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THE

TRAGEDIES

OF

SOPHOCLES

TRANSLATED.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

M.DCC.LXXXVIII.

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SOPHOCLES

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

GEORGIANA

COUNTESS DOWAGER SPENCER,

THIS TRANSLATION OF SOPHOCLES

IS WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT INSCRIBED

BY HER LADYSHIP'S MOST OBLIGED

AND MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT

R. POTTER.

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PREFACE.

SOPHOCLES, the ſon of Sophilus an Athenian, was born at Colonus, and educated with great attention. Superior vigour and addreſs in the exerciſes of the Paleſtra, and ſkill in Muſic, were the great accompliſhments of young men in the ſtates of Greece; in theſe Sophocles excelled; nor was he leſs diſtinguiſhed by the beauty of his perſon. He was alſo inſtructed in the nobleſt of all ſciences, Civil Polity and Religion; from the firſt of theſe he derived an unſhaken love of his country, which he ſerved in ſome embaſſies, and in high military command with Pericles; from the latter he was impreſſed with a pious reverence for the gods, manifeſted by the inviolable integrity of his life. But his ſtudies were early devoted to the Tragic Muſe; the ſpirit of Æſchylus lent a fire to his genius, and excited that noble emulation which led him to contend with, and ſometimes to bear away the prize from his great maſter. He wrote one hundred and thirteen tragedies, of which ſeven only have eſcaped the ravages of time; and having teſtified his love of his country by refuſing to leave it, though invited by many kings, and having enjoyed the uninterrupted eſteem and affection of his fellow citizens, which neither the gallant actions and ſublime genius of Æſchylus, nor the tender ſpirit and philoſophic virtue of Euripides could ſecure to them,

he

he died in the ninety firſt year of his age. The burial-place of his anceſtors was at Decelia, which the Lacedemonians had at that time ſeized and fortified; but Lyſander, the Spartan Chief, permitted the Athenians to interr their deceaſed Poet; and they paid him all the honours due to his love of his country, his integrity of life, and his high poetic excellence.

Æſchylus had at once ſeized the higheſt poſt of honour in the field of Poetry, the true Sublime; to that eminence his claim could not be diſputed. Sophocles had a noble elevation of mind, but tempered with ſo fine a taſte and ſo chaſtiſed a judgement, that he never paſſes the bounds of propriety: under his conduct the Tragic Muſe appears with the chaſt dignity of ſome noble matron at a religious ſolemnity; harmony is in her voice, and grace in all her motions. From him the theatre received ſome additional embelliſhments, and the drama, what made it more active and more intereſting, the introduction of a third Speaker: but his diſtinguiſhing excellence is in the judicious diſpoſition of the fable, and ſo nice a connexion and dependence of the parts on each other, that they all agree to make the event not only probable, but even neceſſary; this is peculiarly admirable in his Oedipus King of Thebes; and in this important point he is far ſuperior to every other dramatic writer.

Ariſtotle, who formed his judgement from the three great Athenian Poets, particularly from Sophocles, obſerves that Tragedy after various changes, having now attained the perfection of its nature, aimed at no further improvements. The latter part of the obſervation was at that time juſt; it continued juſt more than two thouſand years; but of perfection who ſhall decide? The great Critic did not conceive that Nature

could produce a Poet who, without any knowlege of his laws, or of thoſe Grecian models, ſhould exalt Tragedy to an excellence of which neither he nor they had any idea. Shakeſpear had a genius ardent and ſublime as that of Æſchylus, his diction is equally great and daring, his imagination was richer and more luxuriant, his obſervation of the living manners and his knowlege of the human mind more comprehenſive; hence his wonderful power over the paſſions. It is a proof of the commanding force of genius that, as the Agamemnon of Æſchylus, with all its faults, excells any thing that remains to us of the Grecian drama, ſo there are many tragedies of Shakeſpear, though with more and greater faults, which are ſuperior to the Agamemnon. Nature may yet produce another Poet bleſt with the powers of Shakeſpear and the judgement of Sophocles; and the Critic, who ſhall ſee this, may then ſay with Ariſtotle, "Tragedy has now attained the perfection of its nature:" in the mean time we glory in our countryman, and look back with reverence on the three great Poets of Athens. The ſublime and daring Æſchylus reſembles ſome ſtrong and impregnable Caſtle ſituated on a rock, whoſe martial grandeur awes the beholder, its battlements defended by heroes in arms, and its gates proudly hung with trophies. Sophocles appears with ſplendid dignity, like ſome imperial palace of richeſt architecture, the ſymmetry of whoſe parts, and the chaſt magnificence of the whole delight the eye, and command the approbation of the judgement. The pathetic and moral Euripides hath the ſolemnity of a Gothic Temple, whoſe ſtoried windows admit a dim religious light, enough to ſhow us its high embowed roof, and the monuments of the dead which

riſe

riſe in every part, impreſſing our minds with pity and terror at the uncertain and ſhort duration of all human greatneſs, and with an aweful ſenſe of our own mortality.

In works of literature the public is little intereſted in the motives of the writer; yet ſome account of this tranſlation may be neceſſary: it was often requeſted of me immediately after the publication of Euripides; but I wiſhed to leave Dr. Franklin in the undiſturbed poſſeſſion of his well-acquired reputation, and declined the attempt, till a perſon of illuſtrious rank, and more illuſtrious for mental accompliſhments, did me the honour to deſire that I would give the Engliſh reader all that remains of the Tragic Muſe of Greece; a requeſt from ſuch a perſon, and the manner in which it was communicated to me, could not be refuſed. I undertook the work as a taſk, ſenſible of its difficulty, and even deſpairing of my power to expreſs the propriety, the ſweetneſs, the harmony, the force, and the dignity of Sophocles: as I advanced, I was not wholly diſſatisfied with my ſelf; from a taſk it became an amuſement, and then a pleaſure to me. This tranſlation profeſſes to be faithful to the original; and I flatter my ſelf that it is in no ſmall degree correct; this it owes to a learned friend, who did me the favour to reviſe it; with his taſte and judgement I am well acquainted, and I confide in his integrity. My own attention and exertions have not been wanting, as it has been my ambition to make it worthy of the noble perſon to whom it owes its exiſtence, and of the public to which it is now preſented.

SCARNING,
28th *February*, 1788.

OEDIPUS KING OF THEBES.

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OEDIPUS KING OF THEBES.

THE poliſhed citizens of Athens applauded this tragedy; and it has been univerſally eſteemed as the moſt perfect compoſition that ever graced their theatre; the judgment of Ariſtotle and of the beſt criticks hath juſtified this general approbation. The reader will obſerve the wonderful conduct of the poet. The judicious preſervation of the Unities, to uſe the language of criticiſm, produces ſuch a propriety, ſuch a connexion and dependence of what follows on what is paſt, that every circumſtance ſeems to ariſe from the nature of things, and impreſſes on the mind the idea of reality. The diſcovery that Oedipus is himſelf the perſon darkly hinted at by the oracle, the nice gradations by which this diſcovery is carried on, the alternate light and ſhade thrown over it, from the ambiguous anſwers of Tireſias to his clearer declarations, from the encouragement to the alarms which he receives from Jocaſta, from the momentary conviction of its impoſſibility given him by the Corinthian to the full evidence of the fact, keep the mind in awful ſuſpenſe, till the diſtreſſing certainty breaks in upon it at once, and overwhelms it with terror and pity. This drama reſembles an eruption of mount Ætna; at firſt clouds of ſmoke darken the ſky; theſe are diſpelled by a dreadful exploſion of flames; then the threatening ſymptoms abate; thus ſmoke and flame and ſerenity ſucceed each other, till the mountain in an inſtant diſcharges its torrent fires, which ruſh down with

reſiſtleſs fury, roll over palaces, temples, and cities, and carry with them deflagration, ruin, and horror.

Ariſtotle obſerves that in the moſt excellent tragedy, which ſhould be imitative of what produces terror and pity, perſons illuſtrious for their good qualities ought not to be repreſented as fallen from a proſperous to an adverſe fortune; for this would raiſe neither terror nor pity; but lead to impiety. Poetic. c. 13. The precept has been controverted, perhaps with reaſon; yet criticks have taken occaſion to ſhow how faithfully the poet has adhered to this rule, by charging Oedipus with impiety, pride, choler, violence, and intemperate curioſity. It may not therefore be improper to examine this character, as it is drawn by Sophocles. At the firſt appearance of Oedipus we are warmly intereſted in his favour; he is an illuſtrious and honoured king; anxious for the welfare of his realms, and prizing it more than his own life; his addreſſes to the oracle at Delphi, his attention to the anſwers of the god, and the reſpect with which he receives Tireſias, are undoubted indications of his piety. As a king, he is the benevolent father of his people; as a man, generous, intrepid, and wiſe; as an huſband, affectionate and mild; as a father, tender as the pathetic pencil of Euripides could have pourtrayed him. His anxious endeavours to diſcover the murderer of Laius are occaſioned at firſt partly by his reverence of the oracle, and partly by his own ſenſe of juſtice; his further inquiries proceed from a delicate and exquiſite ſenſibility. The poet, to attain his end, has judiciouſly blended this with a certain "firey quality," which blazes out on every occaſion; and, though it ſhows a generous rather than a ferocious mind, naturally

turally leads him into every ill, which the oracle and his deſtiny had rendered inevitable; for as this inſtigated his abrupt departure from Corinth, ſo it inflamed his reſentment of the inſult offered him in the narrow road "where three ways met;" from which fatal encounter all his misfortunes aroſe; yet even in this, the barbarous manners of the times conſidered, he is to be deemed unfortunate rather than criminal. His anger againſt Tireſias was excited by the prophet's refuſal to declare the guilty perſon; he conſidered his ſilence as injurious to himſelf and to his country; his anger therefore aroſe from a generous motive: when at length Tireſias was provoked to ſpeak, and pronounced Oedipus himſelf to be the murderer, conſcious of his innocence (for he then thought himſelf innocent), abhorring the malignity of the accuſation, and perſuaded from concurring circumſtances that the prophet had been ſuborned by Creon, the one muſt appear to him as an impoſtor and a mercenary wretch, the other as a dark deſigning villain, who had fabricated this charge to deprive him of his crown and his life: he is enraged, but not inexorable; at the interceſſion of his friends, even whilſt he is under this perſuaſion, he diſmiſſes Creon with impunity. "The ſtroke, that inflicts the deepeſt wound on a "virtuous and ingenuous nature, is the accuſation of guilt." Richardſon on the character of Imogen. As circumſtances were continually opening, which gave this accuſation an increaſing force that alarmed even his own mind, neither nature nor reaſon could ſuffer a perſon of ſo animated a ſpirit to reſt, till he had drawn aſide the myſterious veil, and diſcovered all the horrors of his fate.

Where

Where then was the guilt of Oedipus? We are to look for it not in his conduct, but in his fate. He was, as Seneca finely expreſſes it, *Phœbi reus*. Before his birth Apollo had foretold that he ſhould murder his father and marry his mother; and his deſtiny led him, againſt every effort of a virtuous mind, involuntarily and unknowingly to accompliſh the oracle; and, what is ſtill worſe, he was equally obnoxious not only to human, but even to divine juſtice, as if he had committed theſe crimes with a daring and impious intention. Such was the religious belief of Athens even in the days of Socrates: we have little cauſe to think our reaſoning powers ſtronger, but we feel our underſtandings more enlightened than were thoſe of the Grecian Sages. We know whence we received this light, let us therefore be thankful for it.

The ſcene is at Thebes before the palace of Oedipus.

Persons of the Drama.

OEDIPUS.

PRIEST of JUPITER.

CREON.

TIRESIAS.

JOCASTA.

CORINTHIAN.

HERDSMAN.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS, Senators of Thebes.

Perſons of the Drama.

OEDIPUS.
PRIEST of JUPITER.
CREON.
TIRESIAS.
JOCASTA.
CORINTHIAN.
HERDSMAN.
MESSENGER.
CHORUS, Senators of THEBES.

OEDIPUS KING OF THEBES.

OEDIPUS, THEBANS.

OEDIPUS.

WHY, O my ſons, ye youthful progeny
Of Cadmus old, why have you here your ſeats
Holding theſe ſuppliant boughs, whilſt incenſe fumes
Through all the town, and ſacred ſongs and cries
Reſound? No vulgar meſſenger I ſend,
But deem it worthy the illuſtrious name
Of Oedipus to learn the cauſe of this
In perſon. Speak then thou, whoſe reverend age
Claims this reſpect; inform me what your ſtate,
Your fears or ſufferings; in each point my will
Is prompt to ſuccour: ruthleſs were my heart,
Did it not melt with pity at this ſight.

PRIEST of JUPITER.

Sovereign of Thebes, imperial Oedipus,
Thou ſeeſt us what we are, who ſit thus low

Before thy altars; ſome, whoſe unfledged wings
Bear them not far; and ſome who bend beneath
The weight of age, Prieſts theſe, my ſelf the Prieſt
Of Jupiter; and ſome, the nobleſt youths,
The flow'r of Thebes. Her other ſons arranged
Along the forum hold their ſuppliant boughs,
And at Minerva's temples, and the ſhrine
Prophetic nigh Iſmenus: for the ſtate,
Thine eyes behold it, labours in the ſtorm,
Unable from the blood-ſtain'd wave to rear
Her head: her opening buds unfruitful fall,
Scorch'd by the baneful blaſts; her paſtured herds
Periſh, her infants periſh ere the birth.
Incumbent o'er the town deſtructive hangs
The firey peſtilence, beneath whoſe force
Thebes becomes deſolate; with ſighs and groans
Mean while the gloomy Pluto is enrich'd.
Now at thy altars ſit I, and theſe youths,
Not that we deem thee equal to the gods,
But 'midſt th' afflicting accidents of life,
Or ſufferings ſent from heav'n, the firſt of men.
For thou at Thebes arriving didſt redeem
The city from the tribute which we paid
To the harſh-ſcreaming monſter, not inform'd
By us, or counſell'd; no, with higher thought

L. 15. οὐδέπω μακρὰν πλέσθαι σθένοντες. Metaphora ab avium pullis implumibus. Burton, a Scholiaſte.

L. 21. Two temples at Thebes were conſecrated to Minerva under the titles of Oncæa, and Iſmenia. Apollo had a temple on the banks of Iſmenus; from the flames and aſhes of its altar his prieſts drew prophecies.

We

We deem thee by ſome god inſpired to raiſe
Our ſtate to life. And now, moſt potent king,
Thus proſtrate at thy feet we all implore
Thy aid; for our diſtreſs find ſome relief,
Attending to ſome god's oracular voice,
Or by ſome ſage inſtructed; for I ſee
The counſels of th' experienced give freſh life
E'en in calamities. Thou beſt of men,
Go on, th' afflicted city once more raiſe;
Go on, and prudence be thy guide. Since now
This country for thy former generous deeds
Hails thee as her preſerver, of thy reign
Let us not hold this memory, that by thee
From ruin raiſed, by ſad reverſe at laſt
We ſink in ruin; but once more this ſtate
Reſtore to ſafety; as thou gaveſt us then
With happy auſpices fair fortune, now
Be like thyſelf. More glorious wilt thou reign
O'er peopled, than o'er deſolated realms:
The ſtrong-ribb'd galley, and the rampired tow'r,
Their martial youth if wanting, nought avail.

OEDIPUS.

O my lamented ſons, for ills well known
To me you ſeek redreſs; I know that grief
Hangs heavy on you all, but moſt on me:
His private ſufferings each bewails; but I
Mourn for the city, for my ſelf, and you.
I want no voice to rouſe me; many tears

Theſe eyes have pour'd, with many anxious thoughts
My breaſt has labour'd, tracing various ways
For your relief. That, which alone could give
Hope of ſucceſs, I follow'd; I have ſent
Creon, whoſe veins are rich with royal blood,
Son of Menœceus, to the Pythian ſhrine
Of Phœbus, to inquire what I muſt do
To ſave this city. As I number back
The days ſince paſt, I marvel; for his ſtay
Exceeds juſt expectation. When he comes,
If I perform not what the god directs,
May I be deem'd the vileſt of mankind.

PRIEST.

Of happy preſage are thy words: theſe youths
Show me that Creon hither bends his ſteps.

OEDIPUS.

Royal Apollo, may he bring ſucceſs
And ſafety, as it brightens in his eye!

PRIEST.

Chearful indeed his aſpect; elſe his head
With wreaths of laurel had not thus been crown'd.

OEDIPUS.

Soon ſhall we know; he now may be addreſs'd.

OEDIPUS, CREON, THEBANS.

OEDIPUS.

Son of Menœceus, to the royal blood
Allied, what anſwer bring'ſt thou from the god?

L. 84. See the Hippolytus of Euripides, l. 850. n.

CREON.

CREON.

Of good I have to tell thee: all our ill
May, if directed well, find happy end.

OEDIPUS.

Relate his words distinctly; for thy speech
Nor gives me confidence, nor wakes my fears.

CREON.

By these encircled wou'dst thou hear, I stand
Ready to speak, or to retire apart.

OEDIPUS.

Speak to them all; for dearer than my life
I prize the means to remedy their grief.

CREON.

Then let me speak what from the god I heard.
The royal Phœbus gave us clear command
Hence the pollution of our realm to drive,
Now nourish'd in the bosom of the land,
Nor cherish an immedicable ill.

OEDIPUS.

What the offence? the expiation what?

CREON.

By exile, or by death avenging death;
For this blood desolates the suffering land.

OEDIPUS.

At whose disastrous fortune doth this point?

CREON.

Once, ere the empire of this state was thine,
Laius, O king, was sovereign lord of Thebes.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

This from the voice of fame hath reach'd my ears,
But Laius never did mine eyes behold.

CREON.

His death the god with no ambiguous voice
Commands us on his murderers to avenge.

OEDIPUS.

Where are they? By what methods may be found
The faint-mark'd footſteps of this long-paſt guilt?

CREON.

This country holds them, ſaid the god. Purſuit
May overtake what through neglect eſcapes.

OEDIPUS.

Beneath ſome roof, or in the open fields,
Or in ſome foreign land was Laius ſlain?

CREON.

Hence to conſult the oracle he went,
And never to his royal houſe return'd.

OEDIPUS.

Did none return, none of his train, who ſaw
His death, of whom inquiry may be made?

CREON.

All fell, ſave one; who, flying wild with fear,
Of what he ſaw one thing alone could tell.

OEDIPUS.

Say what; for one thing, if we gain a gleam
Of hope, may lead us to diſcover more.

CREON.

CREON.

That, met by ruffians, not by one man's force
He fell, but by a numerous band oppreſs'd.

OEDIPUS.

How ſhould the ruffian, if not bribed with gold
From hence, preſume t' attempt this daring deed?

CREON.

Not unſuſpected this: but 'midſt our ills
None to avenge the death of Laius roſe

OEDIPUS.

What preſſing ill, your monarch murder'd thus,
Reſtrain'd you, that inquiry was not made?

CREON.

The dark-deſcanting Sphinx from things unſeen
Forced our attention to more inſtant ills.

OEDIPUS.

But I will bring them into light again
From their firſt cauſe. Of Phœbus for the dead
This zeal is worthy, worthy too of thee;
And me confederate in the ſame juſt cauſe
You ſhall behold; this country and the god
I will avenge. Not for ſome diſtant friend,

L. 140. There is ſome little obſcurity here. Oedipus had declared his purpoſe to engage in this inquiry for the relief of his country, and in concurrence with the god. He now mentions an additional motive, which more nearly concerned himſelf; it was the common cauſe of royalty. The ruffian, that murdered Laius, might, if he were permitted to go unpuniſhed, murder him. By τῶν ἀπολίμ φίλων, "ſome diſtant friend," he points to Laius; the expreſſion is indeed indefinite, but it was neither neceſſary nor proper that it ſhould be more diſtinctly marked; with regard to Laius thus far Oedipus had been very cold and indifferent.

But for myſelf, this execrable guilt
Be it my care to cruſh: for the ſame hand,
That murder'd him, may ſoon be raiſed to plunge
With the ſame rage the falchion in my breaſt;
Therefore avenging him I guard myſelf.
But riſe, my children, from your lowly ſeats
With ſpeed, and bear theſe ſuppliant branches hence.
Hither th' aſſembled ſons of Thebes convene:
My pow'r ſhall be exerted; and once more
Will we, confiding in the favouring god,
Together proſper, or together fall.

PRIEST.

Let us ariſe, my ſons: our ſovereign grants
The grace we came to aſk; and may the god,
Who ſent this anſwer from his hallow'd ſhrine,
Preſerve us, and this waſting peſt avert!

CHORUS.

Thou oracle of Jove, what fate
From Pytho's golden ſhrine
Brings to th' illuſtrious Theban ſtate
Thy ſweet-breathed voice divine?
My trembling heart what terror rends,
While dread ſuſpenſe on thee attends,

L. 156. Oracles were by the ancients ultimately referred to Jupiter. This prophetic power he gave to other deities whom he was diſpoſed to grace: thus Æſchylus, ſpeaking of Apollo, ſays,

With his own ſacred ſkill high Jove inſpired
His raptured ſoul, and placed him on this throne,
The fourth prophetic god, whence now he gives
His father's oracles. THE FURIES.

O Delian

O Delian Pæan, healing pow'r!
Daughter of golden Hope, to me,
Bleſt voice, what now doſt thou decree,
Or in time's future hour?

Daughter of heav'n's almighty lord,
Immortal Pallas, hear!
And thou, Diana, queen ador'd,
Whoſe tutelary care
Protects theſe walls, this favour'd ſtate,
Amidſt the forum 'round whoſe ſeat
Sublime encircling pillars ſtand!
God of the diſtant-wounding bow,
Apollo, hear; avert our woe,
And ſave the ſick'ning land!

This realm when former ills oppreſt
If your propitious pow'r
In mercy cruſh'd the baleful Peſt
Outrageous to devour;
In mercy now extend your care,
For all is miſery and deſpair,
And vain the counſils of the wiſe.
No fruit, no grain to ripeneſs grows;
The matron feels untimely throes,
The birth abortive dies.

The Shades, as birds of rapid flight,
In quick ſucceſſion go,
Quick as the flames that flaſh through night,
To Pluto's realms below.

Th' unpeopled town beholds the dead
Wide o'er her putrid pavements ſpread,
Nor graced with tear or obſequy.
The altars round a mournful band,
The wives, the hoary matrons, ſtand,
And heave the ſuppliant ſigh.

With deep ſighs mix'd the hallow'd ſtrain
Burſts fervent to the ſkies:
Deign then, O radiant Pallas, deign
In all thy might to riſe.
From this fierce pow'r which raging round
Unarm'd inflicts the firey wound,
Daughter of Jove, my country ſave;
Hence, goddeſs, hence the fury ſweep
To Amphitrite's chambers deep,
Or the rough Euxine wave!

Doth aught the Night from ruin ſpare?
The Morning's ſickly ray,
Pregnant with death, inflames the air,
And gives diſeaſe its prey.
Father of gods, whoſe matchleſs force
Wings the red lightning's vengeful courſe,
With all thy thunders cruſh this foe!
Potent to aid, Lycéan king,
Thy ſhafts ſecure of conqueſt wing,
And bend thy golden bow!

L. 204. This is the language of poetry: ſuch is the myrtoum mare and mare creticum of Horace.

Thy

Thy beams around, Diana, throw,
And pierce this gloom of night,
As on Lycæum's moſs-clad brow
Thou pour'ſt thy ſilver light!
Thy nymphs, O Theban Bacchus, lead,
The golden mitre round thy head,
Grief-ſoothing god of wine and joy;
Wave thy bright torch, and with its flame
This god, to gods an odious name,
This lurid Peſt deſtroy!

OEDIPUS, CHORUS.

OEDIPUS.

Well are thy vows addreſs'd; nor vain thoſe vows,
But of much force, and lenient of our ills,
Wou'dſt thou with deep regard attend my words,
Which I, to each related circumſtance
A ſtranger, and a ſtranger to the deed,
Shall ſpeak; for far my ſearch could not extend,
Having no mark to guide my ſteps. But now
A Theban late enroll'd, to all of Thebes
I give this charge. Whoe'er among you knows
By whom the ſon of Labdacus was ſlain,
Him I command t' unfold the whole to me.
But if, through conſcious guilt, he fears t' avow
The deed, and charge himſelf; no harſher doom
Awaits him, than to leave this land, unhurt.
But if among you be a man, who knows

Another, of another realm, whoſe hand
Was with this blood polluted, let him ſpeak,
And not conceal the murderer; for from me
Ample ſhall be his recompence, and thanks
Added beſides. But if ye will not ſpeak,
If fearing for himſelf, or for a friend,
There be a man that diſregards my words,
What then ſhall be my ſolemn mandate hear.
That man let none within this realm, whoſe throne,
Whoſe empire I command, beneath his roof
Receive, let none hold converſe with him, none
Admit him at the altars of the gods
His vows, his offerings to partake, or ſhare
The cleanſing laver; from your houſes all
Chaſe this pollution of our land; for thus
To me the Pythian oracle declared
Its will; thus therefore with the god I join
Confederate, and the dead. But on the wretch
Who did the deed, whether he lies conceal'd
A ſingle ruffian, or with many leagued,
I imprecate this curſe; his wretched days,
Cut off from all the ſocial joys of life,
Let him wear out in miſery. In my houſe
If I protect him, conſcious of the deed,
May all theſe curſes fall on me. The ſame
I charge on you; make you theſe ſolemn vows,

L. 249. This ſevere ſentence was uſually denounced againſt a murderer: Oedipus in his zeal denounces it againſt the perſon who ſhould conceal the murderer of Laius.

In

In zeal for me, for Phœbus, and this land
Thus of its fruits, and its protecting gods
Bereft. Nor ought we, though no voice divine
Impell'd us, unatoned to leave the blood
Of one so noble, of a monarch slain.
To trace this murderous deed my fortune now
Assigns to me, for mine the regal pow'r
Which once was his; his bed, his wife is mine;
Our children too, but that the adverse gods
Denied him children, had in common ties
Been close conjoin'd: but now disastrous fate
Hath burst upon his head. Therefore for him,
As for my father, vengeful will I rise,
Unwearied in th' attempt to find the man
That slew the son of Labdacus, whose blood
From Polydorus its illustrious stream
Derived, from Cadmus, and Agenor old.
To those who act not thus, I pray the gods
That the till'd earth may never yield its fruits,
And barren be their bed; beneath the ills,
Which now oppress us, let them waste, and feel
A fate yet more severe. But to the sons
Of Thebes, who with applause these things receive,
May justice join her aid, and all the gods
Be present always with propitious pow'r!

CHORUS.

As solemnly by thee adjured, O king,
So will I speak. I neither murder'd him,

Nor

Nor can diſcloſe the murderer: to the god,
Who charged that this inquiry ſhould be made,
Belongs it to declare who did the deed.

OEDIPUS.

Well haſt thou ſaid: but to compel the gods
Againſt their will no mortal man has pow'r.

CHORUS.

What more my thought ſuggeſts I would propoſe.

OEDIPUS.

Whate'er it be, forbear not thou to ſpeak.

CHORUS.

Next to th' illuſtrious god I am aſſured
Theſe things th' illuſtrious Seer, Tireſias, knows:
Conſulting him, O king, thou may'ſt obtain
In matters moſt obſcure the cleareſt light.

OEDIPUS.

Nor this have I neglected, but have ſent,
Twice ſent, by Creon prompted, to require
His preſence: ſtrange and tedious his delay.

CHORUS.

Uncertain are the rumours ſpread of old.

OEDIPUS.

What are they? My regard each rumour claims.

CHORUS.

They ſay that by ſome travellers he fell.

OEDIPUS.

This I have heard; who ſaw it none can ſay.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

If fear can touch his heart, when he ſhall hear
Thy imprecations, he will ſhrink at them.

OEDIPUS.

The deed who fear'd not, will not ſhrink at words.

CHORUS.

Here comes who will convict him; for they lead
The reverend Seer, in whom, of mortal men
Alone, from inborn knowledge truth ſhines clear.

OEDIPUS, TIRESIAS, CHORUS.

OEDIPUS.

O ſage Tireſias, whoſe enlighten'd mind
Notes all things, whether ſuch as may be taught
To mortals, or require the ſacred ſeal
Of ſilence, things of heav'n, or things of earth,
Though quench'd thy viſual beam, yet not unknown
To thee the baleful peſtilence that waſtes
The city; from whoſe rage our ſole relief,
Our ſole defence, illuſtrious Seer, is found
In thee; for Phœbus, though perchance thine ear
His mandate hath not reach'd, thus gave reſponſe
To our inquiries, that this peſt ſhall hence
Alone its ravage ceaſe, if, clearly known
The murderers of Laius, we avenge
On them, by exile or by death, his blood.
Refuſe not then, from what of augury
From birds on wing thou draw'ſt, or from aught elſe

Of thy prophetic art, to ſave thy ſelf,
To ſave the city; ſave me too, and put
All the pollution of the dead away.
In thee are all our hopes: t' exert his pow'r
In doing good is man's moſt glorious taſk.

TIRESIAS.

Alas, alas, how dreadful to be wiſe,
From wiſdom when no profit is derived!
Mine is this knowledge, fatal to thy peace.
I ſhould not then have come.

OEDIPUS.

What may this mean?
And why this gloomy ſadneſs on thy brow?

TIRESIAS.

Diſmiſs me to my houſe; thy ills more light
Wilt thou ſuſtain, I mine, this grace obtain'd.

OEDIPUS.

Nor juſt, nor friendly to thy country thou,
Thus to deprive her of thy ſage advice.

TIRESIAS.

Nothing of good to thee thy ſpeech, I ſee,
Portends: of ill productive be not mine.

CHORUS.

Now by the gods, whate'er thy wiſdom knows
Suppreſs it not, we ſuppliant all implore.

TIRESIAS.

For you are all unwiſe. Ne'er ſhall my voice
For this find utterance, nor diſcloſe thy ills.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

To know, and not to ſpeak! Implies not this
Treachery to us, and ruin to the realm?

TIRESIAS.

My peace I will not hurt, nor thine. In vain
Why wilt thou urge? From me thou ſhalt not know.

OEDIPUS.

Thou vileſt of the vile—for thou wou'dſt raiſe
Th' inſenſate rock to rage—wilt thou not ſpeak,
But ſhow thy ſelf unfeeling and unmoved?

TIRESIAS.

My paſſion thou haſt blamed; but doſt not ſee
That which with thee reſides, while me thou blameſt.

OEDIPUS.

Who would not be enraged to hear thy words,
Which caſt diſhonour on this injured ſtate?

TIRESIAS.

Theſe things will come, though ſilent be my voice.

OEDIPUS.

Then what will come, to me thou ſhou'dſt diſcloſe.

TIRESIAS.

Further I will not ſpeak; ſo let thy rage,
If ſuch thy will, in all its fierceneſs riſe.

L. 361. The obvious meaning of theſe words is, "Thou blameſt my uncomplying perverſeneſs, but art not ſenſible of thy own violent paſſions." Euſtathius ingeniouſly ſuppoſes that Tireſias alludes to Jocaſta: this perhaps is too great a refinement; but the prophet through this whole ſcene is dreadfully obſcure.

OEDIPUS.

Then I will ſpeak, as anger prompts my tongue,
Without reſerve whate'er my thoughts ſuggeſt.
Know then I deem thee complice in this act;
I deem the deed was thine, ſave that thy hand
Struck not the blow: hadſt thou enjoy'd thy ſight,
I ſhould pronounce the act were thine alone.

TIRESIAS.

Indeed! Nay then I warn thee to abide
By thine own ſolemn charge, and from this day
Hold converſe nor with theſe, nor me; for thou
Art the accurs'd polluter of this land.

OEDIPUS.

Haſt thou no ſenſe of ſhame, that thou haſt dared
Utter ſuch taunt? How think'ſt thou to eſcape?

TIRESIAS.

I have eſcaped, e'en by the potent truth
Which I maintain.

OEDIPUS.

By whom haſt thou been taught?
Not by thy art divine.

TIRESIAS.

By thee, conſtrain'd
Unwillingly to ſpeak.

OEDIPUS.

What? Speak the words
Again; my knowlege ſo will be more clear.

TIRESIAS.

Were they abſtruſe? Or doſt thou bid me ſpeak
To try me?

OEDIPUS.

Not to ſpeak it as a thing
Known; yet repeat thy words.

TIRESIAS.

Again I ſay
Thou art the much-ſought murderer of the king.

OEDIPUS.

Thou ſhalt not triumph for this ſecond taunt.

TIRESIAS.

More ſhall I ſpeak then, and enrage thee more?

OEDIPUS.

Say what thou wilt, it will be ſaid in vain.

TIRESIAS.

I ſay flagitious is thy intercourſe
With thoſe moſt dear to thee; thou know'ſt not this,
Nor ſeeſt the ills in which thou art involved.

OEDIPUS.

Think'ſt thou no vengeance ſuch reproach awaits?

TIRESIAS.

I have no fear, if truth hath aught of pow'r.

OEDIPUS.

It hath, but not for thee; it is not thine;
Thy ears, thy ſoul, e'en as thine eyes, are blind.

TIRESIAS.

Unhappy thou in thus reproaching me,
For ſoon on thee the ſame reproach ſhall fall.

OEDIPUS.

Confiding in thy blindneſs thou from me,
Or any that have eyes, no vengeance feareſt.

TIRESIAS.

To fall by thee is not my fate; thoſe things
Belong to Phœbus; ample is his pow'r.

OEDIPUS.

The fiction this of Creon, or thine own?

TIRESIAS.

Creon ne'er wrought thee ill: the work is thine.

OEDIPUS.

O greatneſs, empire, and thou nobleſt art
That giv'ſt to life its glory moſt deſired,
What baleful envy on your ſplendor waits,
Since for this royal pow'r by me unſought,
But by the ſtate preſented a free gift,
The faithful Creon, who the firſt appear'd
My friend, with dark and ſecret malice works,
Wiſhing my ruin, and ſuborns this wretch,
This ſorcerer, this artificer of wiles,
Whoſe trains delude the people, ſharp of ſight
To lucre only, to his ſcience blind.
Where haſt thou e'er diſplay'd a prophet's ſkill?
Why, when the ravening hound of hell her charm

Myſterious chanted, for thy country wiſe
Didſt thou not ſolve it? Of no vulgar mind
Was this the taſk; the prophet this required.
No knowlege then from birds didſt thou receive,
None from the gods t' unfold it: but I came,
This nothing-knowing Oedipus, and quell'd
The monſter, piercing through her dark device
By reaſon's force, not taught by flight of birds.
Yet doſt thou now aſſay to drive me out,
Weening to have thy ſtand next Creon's throne.
But thou, and he who form'd this baſe deſign
With thee, ſhall feel my pow'r: but that thine age
Some reverence claims, thou ſhou'dſt e'en now be taught,
And feel the madneſs of thine enterprize.

CHORUS.

If we conjecture right, his words burſt forth
By paſſion dictated; and thine, O king,
No leſs: theſe things behove not; beſt adviſe
How to explore the anſwer of the god.

TIRESIAS.

Thou art a king; yet I have equal right
To anſwer thee; this pow'r is mine; to thee
I am no vaſſal; Phœbus is my lord:
Nor will I be enroll'd 'mongſt thoſe who wait
On Creon for ſupport. I tell thee then,
Me ſince with taunts thou haſt reviled as blind,
Thou haſt indeed thine eyes, yet canſt not ſee

What ills incloſe thee round, nor where thou haſt
Thy habitation, nor with whom thou liveſt.
Know'ſt thou who gave thee birth? Thou art a foe,
And know'ſt it not, to thoſe allied to thee
Moſt cloſely, whom the realms beneath contain,
And who behold the light of heav'n. The curſe
Of father and of mother on each ſide
With dreadful ſteps purſues thee, and ere long
Will chaſe thee from this land, now bleſt with ſight,
Then blind. How will Cithæron, how each ſtrand
Ere long re-echo to thy mournful cries,
When thou ſhalt know that, driv'n by ſwelling gales,
The port of marriage thou haſt gain'd, thy bark
Where anchor cannot hold! The numerous train
Of other ills thou ſeeſt not, which will rank
In the ſame line thee and thy ſons alike.
Go to; with foul revilings Creon taunt,
And my true voice; yet thing more vile than thou
Is not 'mong mortals that ſhall e'er be cruſh'd.

OEDIPUS.

From him theſe piercing inſults muſt I bear?
Perdition on thee! hence, away, begone.

TIRESIAS.

I had not come, hadſt thou not ſent for me.

OEDIPUS.

I knew thee not in ſpeech ſo void of ſenſe,
Or here thy preſence I had ſcarce required.

TIRESIAS.

TIRESIAS.

Such thou may'ſt deem my ſpirit, void of ſenſe:
But they, who gave thee birth, eſteem'd me wiſe.

OEDIPUS.

Who are they? Stay. Of thoſe that breathe to whom
Owe I my birth?

TIRESIAS.

Thy birth this day will ſhow,
This day will ſhow the horrors of thy fate.

OEDIPUS.

How dark, how full of myſtery all thy words!

TIRESIAS.

Such to unfold well ſuits thy piercing mind.

OEDIPUS.

My glory thou wou'dſt turn to my reproach.

TIRESIAS.

That glory hath brought ruin on thy head.

OEDIPUS.

If I have ſaved this realm, I reck not that.

TIRESIAS.

Well then, I now depart. Boy, lead me hence.

OEDIPUS.

Ay, let him lead thee; for thy preſence throws
Confuſion on th' affairs that now engage
Our care: begone, and trouble us no more.

TIRESIAS.

TIRESIAS.

I go: but firſt will ſpeak for what I came,
Nor dread thy frown; thy vengeance hath no pow'r
To touch my life. I tell thee that the man,
Whom thou haſt ſought, 'gainſt whom thy ſolemn charge,
Thy threats have been proclaim'd, that man is here;
Of foreign birth now deem'd, his reſidence
Here fixing; but full ſoon he ſhall be found
A Theban born, nor in his fortune long
Rejoice; his viſual ray in darkneſs quench'd,
His high ſtate ſunk to beggary, a ſtaff
Shall to a foreign land his ſteps direct.
A brother and a father to his ſons
Shall he appear; to her, that gave him birth,
A ſon and huſband; to his father found
A rival and a murderer. Go thou in;
Muſe on theſe things; ſay, if thou find them falſe,
No portion of a prophet's ſkill is mine.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

All yet is dark. What wretch abhorr'd,
Graſping with blood-ſtain'd hand his ruthleſs ſword,

L. 498. The word ὁμόσπορος ſignifies a man who has children by the ſame woman who had children by the other perſon mentioned; and this preciſe idea ought to be preſerved in the tranſlation; but how is this to be done? Adulter, inceſtus, do not convey this idea, yet ſuch are the latin verſions; neither does the word *rival* reach it. A periphraſis here would be unpardonable, and our language affords no word of equal ſignification; the tranſlator therefore feels himſelf in the ſame ſituation with the bad painter, who drew a lion ſo vilely, that he was obliged to write LION under the picture, to inform the ſpectators what animal was intended.

From

From Delphi's high rock-ſeated ſhrine
Declares the voice divine
The author of this horrid deed?
Now let him wing his ſwifteſt ſpeed;
The ſon of Jove upon him flies,
Arm'd with the flames and lightenings of the ſkies:
Dreadful, reſiſtleſs in their force
The Fates attend his courſe.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

The oracle divinely bright
To drag the latent murderer into light
Shone forth, Parnaſſus, from thy brow
White with eternal ſnow:
For, like a bull, to ſecret ſhades,
To rocks, to caves, to ſylvan glades,
Far from the Pythian prophecies
Mournful the ſolitary wanderer flies:
In vain: they hover round his head,
And ceaſeleſs terrors ſpread.

STROPHE 2.

Dreadful, dreadful things to hear
Utters the prophetic Seer.
Him doth truth, doth falſehood guide?
Fear and hope my ſoul divide;
Painful ſuſpenſe! The preſent and the paſt
Darkening clouds alike o'ercaſt.

Was wrong by Laius done of old,
That made the ſon of Polybus his foe?
Such in no record is enroll'd;
Nought at this hour of proof I know,
Decreeing as the Seer decreed,
To charge on Oedipus the ſecret deed.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Jove, high ruler of the ſkies,
And the Pythian god are wiſe;
They the deeds of mortals know,
All whate'er is done below:
Of knowlege doth the Seer a brighter ray,
Than illumines me, diſplay?
Some deeper drink of wiſdom's ſpring;
But proofs, that flaſh conviction I demand.
The Sphinx diſplay'd her dreadful wing,
His wiſdom ſaved the ſinking land;
Then let my grateful ſoul diſdain
To rank the hero with the murderer's train.

CREON, CHORUS.

CREON.

Ye citizens of Thebes, th' atrocious crime,
Charged on me by the royal Oedipus,
Hath reach'd my ear: my ſoul diſdains the charge.
If in the preſent ills he deems that aught
Of injury to him by word or deed
By me hath been attempted, let me breathe

This

This vital air no longer, ſuch ill fame
Suſtaining: for no trivial damage brings
This accuſation, but of import high
To me, if I ſhall be reputed baſe
By thee, and by my friends, and by the ſtate.

CHORUS.

From violence of paſſion this reproach
Haply burſt forth, more than from ſober thought.

CREON.

Whence his perſuaſion that the Seer, with me
In compact, to theſe falſehoods train'd his tongue?

CHORUS.

Such things were ſaid, I know not with what thought.

CREON.

Roll'd his eye wild, diſorder'd ſeem'd his ſenſe,
Againſt me when this hated charge was urged?

CHORUS.

I know not; for it is not mine to ſee
What princes do. But this way comes the king.

OEDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

OEDIPUS.

Dareſt thou come hither? In thy inſolence
Art thou ſo harden'd, as again to tread
My courts, detected in thy baſe deſign
To murder me, and from my brows to rend
The regal crown? Now tell me, by the gods,

Haſt thou mark'd in me aught of cowardice
Or folly, that encouraged thee to form
Such daring thoughts? Or deem'ſt thou that the deed,
Creeping with dark inſidious ſtep, mine eye
Would not obſerve; or if obſerved, my hand
Would not chaſtiſe? How frentic thy attempt,
Nor friends nor forces thine, at ſovereign pow'r,
By multitudes and treaſures gain'd, to aim?

CREON.

Know'ſt thou what thou wou'dſt do? To my reply
Give an impartial hearing: learn, then judge.

OEDIPUS.

Potent art thou in ſpeech, but I unapt
To learn from thee, my dark and deadly foe.

CREON.

To this now hear me what I firſt reply.

OEDIPUS.

But this reply not, that thou art not baſe.

CREON.

If thou canſt think a ſelf-will'd petulance,
Devoid of reaſon, good, thou art not wiſe.

OEDIPUS.

If thou canſt think no vengeance will purſue
Injuſtice to a friend, thou art not wiſe.

CREON.

This, I allow, is juſt; but why alledged?
Show me what wrong thou haſt received from me.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

Was it not thy ſuggeſtion, thy advice,
That I ſhould ſend to this all-honour'd Seer?

CREON.

It was: my judgement yet remains unchanged.

OEDIPUS.

What time hath paſs'd ſince Laius by the hands
Of ruffians fell?

CREON.

We may trace back a length
Of diſtant time.

OEDIPUS.

And was this prophet then
Famed for his ſkill?

CREON.

For wiſdom as renown'd
As now, and highly honour'd.

OEDIPUS.

At that time
Made he of me no mention?

CREON.

None: not once
When I was preſent.

OEDIPUS.

Made you then no ſearch
To trace this bloody deed?

CREON.

We did: but vain
Our anxious care.

OEDIPUS.

Why did not then this Seer
Declare theſe things?

CREON.

I know not; and on points
Unknown I would be ſilent.

OEDIPUS.

But one point,
Thy own concern, is not to thee unknown;
And this thou canſt diſcloſe.

CREON.

What is it? Speak;
For nothing known to me will I deny.

OEDIPUS.

Were he not baſely leagued with thee, he ne'er
Had ſaid that Laius by my hand was ſlain.

CREON.

If he ſaith this, thou know'ſt. I claim the right
To queſtion thee, as thou haſt queſtion'd me.

OEDIPUS.

Aſk what thou wilt; I never ſhall be found
A blood-ſtain'd murderer.

CREON.

Is my ſiſter thine,
By nuptial ties united?

OEDIPUS.

Thou haſt aſk'd
What will not be denied.

CREON.

Doſt thou not ſhare
With her the ſovereign pow'r?

OEDIPUS.

All that is mine
I to her will devote.

CREON.

Is not my ſeat
The higheſt, next your throne?

OEDIPUS.

And for that cauſe
Doſt thou appear a baſe and faithleſs friend.

CREON.

Not ſo; wou'dſt thou, like me, with temperate thought
Ponder things well. For firſt reflect, what man
Would chuſe to be a king, with all the fears
On royalty awaiting, might he ſleep
Secure of fear, yet kingly pow'r poſſeſs?
It is not in my nature, nor in his
Who knows what wiſdom is, to form a wiſh
To be a monarch, rather than to uſe
A monarch's potency. All things from thee
I now obtain, nor feel the pangs of fear.
Were I a king, I ſhould do many things

Againſt

Againſt my will: can then the regal ſtate
Be ſweeter to me than my princely rank,
And pow'r that knows not care? Nor is my mind
By falſehood ſo beguiled, that it aſpires
To honours which no real good procure.
Now all things give me pleaſure; all men now
Greet me with courteſy; now all, who want
Favours from thee, addreſs me, for their ſuits
Through me they all obtain. And ſhall I quit
Theſe ſolid pleaſures for the empty pomp
Of royalty? A mind to wiſdom train'd
Can not be ſo depraved: I never loved
To form ſuch meaſures, nor in ſuch would deign
To ſhare with others. Doſt thou want a proof?
Go to the Pythian ſhrine, and there enquire
If faithfully the anſwer of the god
I have reported: if thou find me leagued
In counſils with the Seer, put me to death,
And in the ſentence ſhall my voice aſſent
With thine: but on ſuſpicion void of proof
Condemn me not: the juſt not lightly deem
The baſe man honeſt, or the honeſt baſe.
For he, that throws a faithful friend away,
Doth himſelf equal wrong as if he threw
His life away, which is moſt dear to him.
This thou wilt know in time; for time alone
Shows a juſt man; the baſe a day unveils.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

His words are wiſe: beware, O king, nor err
Through paſſion: quick reſolves are oft unſafe.

OEDIPUS.

When quick the lurking traitor 'gainſt my life
Advances, me behoves a quick defence:
If I am ſtill, and linger, his deſigns
Will be atchieved, and my ſlow meaſures fail.

CREON.

What wou'dſt thou then? My exile from this land?

OEDIPUS.

No: not thy exile would I, but thy death.

CREON.

When thou haſt ſhown me guilty of ſome crime.

OEDIPUS.

Thou ſpeak'ſt as one refuſing to obey.

CREON.

Becauſe I ſee thee not by wiſdom ruled.

OEDIPUS.

For mine own wellfare wiſely I provide.

CREON.

Mine claims an equal care.

OEDIPUS.

But thou art baſe.

CREON.

What, though no crime thou know'ſt?

OEDIPUS.

I will be king.

CREON.

Thou ſhou'dſt not be a tyrant.

OEDIPUS.

Thebes, O Thebes!

CREON.

Thebes is not thine alone: ſome ſhare is mine.

CHORUS.

Princes forbear: in happy hour, behold,
Jocaſta comes; her prudence may prevail,
And in this firey conteſt mediate peace.

JOCASTA, OEDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

JOCASTA.

Why, indiſcreetly why this ſtrife of words,
Unhappy princes, have you raiſed, nor bluſh,
Your country with afflictions thus oppreſs'd,
To ſtir up private conteſt? Wilt not thou
Enter theſe gates? Thou, Creon, hence depart,
Nor add a cauſeleſs grief to weighty woes?

CREON.

Alas, my ſiſter, with injurious rage
A dreadful ſentence Oedipus decrees,
Exile or death, againſt me to enforce.

OEDIPUS.

I own it: for I found him with baſe arts
Againſt my perſon plotting baſe deſigns.

CREON.

CREON.

If I have done this, of this heinous charge
If I am guilty, let me not enjoy
The light of heav'n, but fall a wretch accurs'd.

JOCASTA.

Believe him, I conjure thee by the gods,
In this believe him, Oedipus; regard
His ſacred oath, and me, and theſe thy friends.

CHORUS.

I too entreat thee, be perſuaded, king:
With wiſdom yield.

OEDIPUS.

What wou'dſt thou I ſhould yield?

CHORUS.

To reverence him, not weakly juſtified
Before, but by his oath more ſtrongly now.

OEDIPUS.

Know'ſt thou what thou wou'dſt aſk?

CHORUS.

Full well.

OEDIPUS.

Then ſpeak.

CHORUS.

On dark ſuſpicion charge not, nor diſgrace
With blame a friend, who thus atteſts the gods.

OEDIPUS.

Now be aſſured that, ſeeking this, thou ſeek'ſt
My ruin, or my exile from this land.

CHORUS.

No: by the brighteſt of the pow'rs of heav'n,
The Sun, of every god, of every friend
Abandon'd may I periſh, ſunk in deep
Perdition, if I e'er had ſuch a thought.
My country's ruin rends by bleeding heart:
And greater were my grief, to former ills
If ills were added from your conteſt ſprung.

OEDIPUS.

Then let him go, e'en though I needs muſt die,
Or from this country with diſgrace be driven.
Thy mournful plea, not his, my pity moves;
Him ſhall my hate, where'er he goes, purſue.

CREON.

Harſh art thou e'en in yielding; when thy rage
Works its fell purpoſe, dreadful: ſouls like thine
Juſtly bring keeneſt tortures on themſelves.

OEDIPUS.

Then leave me to my ſelf: begone.

CREON.

I go,
To thee perchance not known; but ſtill by theſe,
Juſt to my innocence, in honour held.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Why, lady, this delay to lead him hence?

JOCASTA.

JOCASTA.

First what hath happen'd here I wiſh to know.

CHORUS.

Words of dark import gave ſuſpicion birth:
Hence an injurious charge which gnaws the heart.

JOCASTA.

From each to each?

CHORUS.

E'en ſo.

JOCASTA.

And what the cauſe?

CHORUS.

Enough, for me enough, my country ſunk
With ſuch afflictions, where they ceaſe to ceaſe.

OEDIPUS.

I know thee wiſe and good; why then perſiſt
Thus to depreſs me, and to damp my heart?

CHORUS.

Let me repeat what I before declared.
Know then, O king, I muſt be deem'd of ſenſe
Bereft, and loſt to wiſdom, if in thought
I could abandon thee. Thou once didſt raiſe
This my dear country when with ills depreſs'd;
If thou haſt pow'r, to ſafety guide us now.

JOCASTA.

Now, by the gods, inform me whence this rage,
That with ſuch fury flames, O king, aroſe.

OEDIPUS.

I will inform thee (for than theſe more high
I reverence thee) of Creon's baſe deſigns.

JOCASTA.

Speak, if accuſing him thy proof be clear.

OEDIPUS.

He ſaith I murder'd Laius.

JOCASTA.

Said he this
On his own knowlege, or from others heard?

OEDIPUS.

The prophet prompt to miſchief he ſuborn'd,
Whoſe rude licentious tongue knows no reſtraint.

JOCASTA.

Think of thy ſelf, reſpecting this, no more.
Hear me, and be aſſured no mortal man
Knows by prophetic art events to come;
Of this I give thee a deciſive proof.
To Laius once an oracle announced
(I will not ſay that from the god it came,
But from his miniſters) that time ſhould bring
On him this fate, to fall beneath a ſon
That ſhould his birth from him and me derive.
Yet foreign ruffians him, as fame reports,
Murder'd where three ways meet. A ſon was born;
Not three days paſs'd, the infant's feet he bound,

L. 736. Oedipus here obliquely cenſures the Chorus as wanting in reſpect to Jocaſta, by declining to anſwer her enquiry, l. 714.

Piercing the nerves, and by another's hand
Upon a desert mountain cast him forth.
The consummation then, that he should slay
His father, or that Laius by his son
Should fall, a fate so dreadful to his thoughts,
Phœbus atchieved not; yet th' oracular voice
Decreed these things: regard them not: the god,
What from his hallow'd shrine he gave command
To trace, to your enquiries will disclose.

OEDIPUS.

What wild amazement, lady, at thy words
Seizes my troubled thoughts, and shakes my soul.

JOCASTA.

What perturbation moves thee thus to speak?

OEDIPUS.

Methought I heard thee say that Laius fell,
Murder'd by ruffian force, where three ways meet.

JOCASTA.

Such was the rumour then: it still prevails.

OEDIPUS.

Where? In what land befell this dire event?

JOCASTA.

Phocis the realm is call'd; the separate roads
From Delphi and from Daulia there unite.

OEDIPUS.

What length of time, since this was done, hath pass'd?

JOCASTA.

JOCASTA.

Short time before the regal crown of Thebes
Shone on thy brows, theſe tidings reach'd the ſtate.

OEDIPUS.

To me, O Jove, what fate haſt thou decreed?

JOCASTA.

Why hath a thought like this poſſeſs'd thy ſoul?

OEDIPUS.

No queſtions now; but tell me what the form
Of Laius, what his ſtature, and his age.

JOCASTA.

Tall, and of manly port; his locks juſt tinged
With gray; his form not much unlike to thine.

OEDIPUS.

O wretched me! Unweeting on my ſelf
What dreadful curſes have I here denounced!

JOCASTA.

Why this? I tremble as I look on thee.

OEDIPUS.

Greatly I fear the prophet ſees too well.
Yet one thing more: That will give clearer light.

JOCASTA.

I tremble; yet whate'er I know will ſpeak.

OEDIPUS.

Went he with few; or, as became a king,
With many guards attendant on his ſtate?

JOCASTA.

JOCASTA.

Without more train than five, an herald one
Of theſe; a ſingle chariot bore the king.

OEDIPUS.

Ah wretched me! All now is clear indeed.
What man was he who this relation brought?

JOCASTA.

A menial ſervant, who alone eſcaped.

OEDIPUS.

Is he now here attending in the houſe?

JOCASTA.

No: for returning thence when thee he ſaw
Holding the ſovereign power, and Laius dead,
Touching my hand me ſuppliant he implored
Some rural charge among the paſtured herds
To give him, that within the walls of Thebes
He ſeldom might be ſeen; I ſent him: this,
And greater grace he, though a ſlave, deſerved.

OEDIPUS.

Let him with ſwifteſt ſpeed then be recall'd.

JOCASTA.

He ſhall. But why to ſee him this deſire?

OEDIPUS.

I for my ſelf have fears: much hath been ſaid,
Which prompts my eager wiſh to ſee this man.

JOCASTA.

He ſoon will come. But am not I, O king,
Worthy what thus diſtracts thy thoughts to know?

OEDIPUS.

My expectation to ſuch height is raiſed,
That I will tell thee: for in whom more dear
Can I, thus ſtruggling with my fate, confide?
My father was the royal Polybus
Of Corinth; Merope, who boaſts her birth
From Dorian Chiefs, my mother; in that ſtate
I was eſteem'd the greateſt, till there chanced
A circumſtance, which might my wonder claim,
But nought of anxious care: amidſt a feaſt
One fill'd with wine reviled me as not born
The ſon of Corinth's king: ill brook'd I this,
And ſcarce that day reſtrain'd my ſelf; the next
My father and my mother I addreſs'd,
Earneſt to trace the truth: the inſult raiſed
Their high reſentment, though from heat of wine
It ſprung; with their affection I was pleaſed;
Yet ſtill this ſtung my heart, ſo deeply there
It rankled. Anxious to the Pythian ſhrine,
My purpoſe not diſcloſed, I take my way;
To this enquiry no reply was deign'd,
And me unhonour'd Phœbus ſent away;
But ſhow'd, the fates foretelling, other ills
With woe, with horror pregnant: he declared
That with my mother I was doom'd to mix

Embraces,

Embraces, and to light produce a race
By men to be abhorr'd; nay, doom'd to be
The murderer of my father. When theſe words
Reach'd my affrighted ear, from Corinth wide,
My courſe thenceforth directing by the ſtars,
I fled, where I might ne'er behold the ſhame,
The infamy of theſe dire oracles
Fulfill'd. My way purſuing, to the place
I came, where thou haſt ſaid this monarch fell.
Yes, I will tell thee all the truth: as near
This place, where three ways meet, I held my courſe,
An herald, and exalted on a car
One of ſuch form as thy deſcription mark'd,
Met me: with force the leader of the way,
And the old Chief himſelf againſt me ruſh'd,
And drove me back; the leader, who aſide
Had turn'd me, in my rage I ſtrike: the Chief,
Soon as he ſaw me paſſing near the car,
Smote me, againſt my head he aim'd the blow,
He ſmote me twice; but from this hand received
Unequal recompence; beneath my ſtaff
At once he ſunk, and from his chariot roll'd.
I ſlew them all. Now ſhould theſe kindred deeds
Prove like relation 'twixt this ſtranger ſlain
And Laius, lives there ſuch a wretch as I?
Lives there a man ſo hateful to the gods?
Nor citizen nor ſtranger may henceforth
Beneath their roof receive me, none with me

Hold converſe, from their houſes all conſtrain'd
To thruſt me; yet none other, but my ſelf,
Denounced theſe curſes on me. I pollute
The bed of him, who periſh'd by theſe hands,
Theſe blood-ſtain'd hands? And am I not moſt vile?
Am I not all defiled? If I muſt fly,
And exiled never, never ſee thoſe friends
That are moſt dear to me, and never tread
My country's ſoil again; if I muſt mount
My mother's bed, in fated nuptials join'd;
If I muſt kill my father Polybus,
From whom my life, my nurture I received;
Who would not judge, who would not ſay with truth
That ſome remorſeleſs Dæmon wrought theſe woes?
But never, never, O ye holy pow'rs
Of the juſt gods, may I behold that day!
No: from the ſight of mortals let me ſink,
Ere ſee a ſtain like this pollute my life.

CHORUS.

Theſe things, O king, our conſternation raiſe:
Yet ſee this herdſman, hear him; meanwhile hope.

OEDIPUS.

With eager expectation I await
His preſence: hope till his arrival lives.

JOCASTA.

What doth thy thought, when he appears, intend?

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

I will inform thee: if his words be found
With thine according, I eſcape theſe woes.

JOCASTA.

What of high import heard'ſt thou in my words?

OEDIPUS.

From his report thou ſaidſt that Laius fell
By ruffians ſlain: that number if he ſtill
Aſſert, I ſlew him not; it can not be
That one be many; by a ſingle arm
If he declares the monarch fell, on me
The dreadful deed with all its guilt will fall.

JOCASTA.

Of his relation be aſſured; his words
He cannot now retract; not I alone,
But all Thebes heard them: with his former tale
Be his tongue now at variance, yet, O king,
Not of the death of Laius will he ſpeak
As by the god foretold, that he muſt fall
Slain by my ſon: him my unhappy child
Slew not, but periſh'd, ere his death, himſelf.
What then the faith of oracles? Nor that
To thee denounced, nor this will I regard.

OEDIPUS.

Thy ſentiments are juſt: yet ſend with ſpeed
To bring this herdſman back; omit not that.

JOCASTA.

JOCASTA.

This I will haſte to do: but go we in.
Whate'er to thee is pleaſing I would do.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Fair Fortune deign with me to dwell,
My ſoul if holy reverence awes,
By thinking, ſpeaking, acting well,
To bow obedient to the Laws.
From heav'n they draw their lineage high,
And tread with ſtately ſtep the ſky:
Their father the Olympian king;
No mixture of man's mortal mold;
Nor ſhall Oblivion's ſable wing
In ſhades their active virtues fold.
In them the god is great, nor fears
The withering waſte of years.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

The tyrant Pride engenders. Pride
With wealth o'er-fill'd, with greatneſs vain,
Mounting with Outrage at her ſide,
The ſplendid ſummit if ſhe gain,

L. 910. With equal ſublimity and energy the excellent Hooker expreſſes himſelf on the ſame ſubject.—"Of Law there can be no leſs acknowledged, than that her ſeat is the boſom "of God, her voyce the harmony of the World; all things in Heaven and Earth do her "homage, the very leaſt as feeling her care, and the greateſt as not exempted from her "power; both Angels, and men, and creatures of what condition ſoever, though each in "different ſort and manner, yet all with uniform conſent admiring her as the mother of their "peace and joy."

Falls headlong from the dangerous brow,
Down dash'd to ruin's gulf below.
Not so our monarch: for of old,
His contest glorious to the state,
In her own blood the Fury roll'd:
So may the god now guide his fate!
Still be the god's protection mine,
Strong in his power divine!

STROPHE 2.

But should some wretch, contemptuous, bold,
Brave the just gods, his hands with slaughter stain,
The vengeful pow'rs of heav'n disdain,
Nor their pure seats in holy reverence hold,
Him may perdition sweep away,
And thus his wanton pride repay;
Him too, whom wild Ambition prompts to seize,
Though Justice cries aloud, forbear.
Can all his vaunts, who dares attempts like these,
Guard his proud heart from guilty fear?
Such deeds if glory waits, in vain
I lead this choral train.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

No more at Delphi's central cell,
At Abæ, or Olympia's hallow'd shrine
Attendant pay I rites divine,
Till the god deigns this darkness to dispell.
O Jove,

L. 943. Abæ was in the territory of Phocis, of old sacred to Apollo, who had an oracle there.

O Jove, if thee we rightly call
The ſovereign lord, the king of all,
Let not concealment this in ſhades enfold
From thee, and thy immortal reign!
The oracles, to Laiùs giv'n of old,
They ſpurn with inſolent diſdain,
No more to Phœbus honours pay;
And things divine decay.

JOCASTA, CHORUS.

JOCASTA.

Ye rulers of the ſtate, with zealous mind
I haſten to the temples of the gods,
Bearing theſe wreaths, this incenſe in my hands;
For Oedipus with every anxious thought
Is tortured in ſuſpenſe, nor, as becomes
His wiſdom, from the paſt right judgement forms
Of later oracles, but yields his mind
To him that ſpeaks, of terrors if he ſpeak.
But ſince exhorting him I nought avail,
To thee, Lycèan Phœbus, (for thy ſhrine
Is neareſt) ſuppliant to preſent theſe pray'rs
I go, that thou wou'dſt grant us from theſe griefs
Holy deliverance; for we all muſt fear,
When him, who ſteers our bark, we ſee appall'd.

there. The ſoldiers of Xerxes ſet fire to the temple, and burned it to the ground: the Romans afterwards, through reverence of the god, gave the Abæans the privilege of being governed by their own laws.—Pauſan. Phocic.

Olympia firſt became illuſtrious on account of the Oracle of Olympian Jupiter.—Strabo.

CORIN-

CORINTHIAN, JOCASTA, CHORUS.

CORINTHIAN.

May I by you, O ſtrangers, be inform'd
Which is the royal ſeat of Oedipus?
Or where, inſtruct me, may I find the king?

CHORUS.

The regal manſion this; the king is there;
The mother of his children here behold.

CORINTHIAN.

Oh be thou bleſt, and ever with the bleſt
Converſe, ſince thou art his accompliſh'd wife!

JOCASTA.

And be thou bleſt too, ſtranger; worthy thou
For theſe thy courteous words. But ſay what cauſe
Brought thee to Thebes: what haſt thou to relate?

CORINTHIAN.

Good tidings to thy houſe, and to thy lord.

JOCASTA.

Thoſe happy tidings what? Whence art thou come?

CORINTHIAN.

From Corinth. May what I ſhall ſpeak to thee
Give joy! Yet haply it may give thee grief.

JOCASTA.

What may this be, and whence its double force?

L. 974. Παγ̓ιλὴς and τέλεια, as here uſed, do not ſignify perfection ſimply, but perfection in the marriage-ſtate, when the nuptial bed is bleſſed with children. Hence the Ἀνδρὸς τελείου δῶμα, and the Ζεὺ τέλειε of Æſchylus. Agamm. v. 981.

CORINTHIAN.

The Isthmian states (so, lady, fame proclaims
Among them) will appoint thy lord their king.

JOCASTA.

Holds not the aged Polybus that pow'r?

CORINTHIAN.

No more; for death hath laid him in the tomb.

JOCASTA.

What wou'dst thou say, that Polybus is dead?

CORINTHIAN.

If I speak aught but truth, be death my meed.

JOCASTA.

Go, my attendant, hasten to thy lord,
And tell him this. Ye oracles divine,
Where are you? Oedipus long since, through fear
Lest he should kill the king, from Corinth fled;
Now he is dead before this wretched fate,
Nor fell he by the hand of Oedipus.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, CORINTHIAN, CHORUS.

OEDIPUS.

O my Jocasta, dearest to my soul,
Why hast thou sent my presence to require?

JOCASTA.

Hear thou this man; then ponder well what end
The gods' high-honour'd oracles have found.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

Who is this ſtranger? With what tidings fraught?

JOCASTA.

From Corinth is he come, to tell thee this,
That Polybus thy father is no more.

OEDIPUS.

Speak, ſtranger; I would be inform'd by thee.

CORINTHIAN.

If this I plainly muſt at firſt declare,
Know thou that he hath trod the path to death.

OEDIPUS.

By treachery, or th' attack of ſome diſeaſe?

CORINTHIAN.

Slight force will ſink the limbs of age to reſt.

OEDIPUS.

Waſted by ſickneſs then, it ſeems, he died.

CORINTHIAN.

And weary progreſs through a length of years.

OEDIPUS.

Alas, alas! Why, lady, ſhould we pay
To Delphi's fate-foretelling ſhrine regard,
Or to the flight of birds that clang aloft?
I by their auſpices was doom'd to ſlay

L. 1003. This is in ſtrict conformity to antient manners. When a meſſenger was charged with any mournful tidings, he endeavoured to ſoften the relation by prefacing it with ſomething of an happier nature: Primum, ut opinor, εὐαγγέλια, ſays Cicero to Atticus, Epiſt. 3. Lib. 2. So this man would firſt have ſaluted Oedipus as king of Corinth, but is compelled againſt his will to ſpeak firſt of the death of Polybus. Dr. Burton.

My father: but beneath the earth he lies
In death; and I am here, the ſword not touch'd:
Unleſs perchance through fond deſire of me
He waſted, ſo from me he had his death.
But, bearing with him all thoſe oracles
Of no account, he lies among the dead.

JOCASTA.

All this did I not tell thee long ago?

OEDIPUS.

Thou didſt; but I was borne away by fears.

JOCASTA.

Now then let none of them diſturb thy mind.

OEDIPUS.

Behoves me not to fear my mother's bed?

JOCASTA.

Why ſhould man fear, ſince fortune governs all?
Sage forecaſt ſees nought clearly: wiſeſt then
Is he who lives at hazard, as he may.
Fear not thy mother's bed; it is a dream,
Such as hath haunted many: he, who ſlights
Theſe things, walks eaſieſt through the ways of life.

OEDIPUS.

In all theſe things thy words are wiſe and juſt,
But that my mother lives; and while ſhe lives,
Though wiſe thy words, I muſt perforce have fears.

JOCASTA.

Clear proof thy father's tomb affords thine eyes.

OEDIPUS.

True; but ſhe lives: my fears are therefore juſt.

CORINTHIAN.

What woman this, who thus excites your fears?

OEDIPUS.

Merope, ſtranger, wife of Polybus.

CORINTHIAN.

And what to her relating gives you fear?

OEDIPUS.

An oracle heav'n-ſent, of import dread.

CORINTHIAN.

To be divulged? Or may not ſtrangers know?

OEDIPUS.

They may: and thus the Pythian god declared,
That I am doom'd to mount my mother's bed,
And with theſe hands to ſhed my father's blood.
Dreading theſe things from Corinth far I fled
Long ſince, by fortune bleſs'd indeed, but ſweet
The pleaſure to behold a parent's face.

CORINTHIAN.

Urged by this fear from Corinth didſt thou fly?

OEDIPUS.

And anxious not to ſhed my father's blood.

CORINTHIAN.

Why, ſince benevolent to thee I came,
Should I not free thee from this anxious fear?

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

Grateful requital, ſtranger, this would claim.

CORINTHIAN.

For this I chiefly came, at thy return
That from thy hand ſome boon I might receive.

OEDIPUS.

It may not be: to thoſe who gave me birth
I never will return.

CORINTHIAN.

This clearly ſhows
Thou know'ſt not what thou doſt.

OEDIPUS.

Now by the gods
Old man, explain theſe words.

CORINTHIAN.

If thy return
For their ſake be denied.

OEDIPUS.

My fears are ſtrong,
Leſt by th' event the oracle be found
Prophetic of the truth.

CORINTHIAN.

Doſt thou then fear
Pollution from thy parents?

OEDIPUS.

That, old man,
That always gives me fear.

CORINTHIAN.

Then be assured

Thou hast no cause for fear.

OEDIPUS.

No cause, if they

My parents, I their son?

CORINTHIAN.

Nought to thy blood

Was Polybus allied.

OEDIPUS.

What mean thy words?

Was he not then my father?

CORINTHIAN.

E'en as much

As I, no more.

OEDIPUS.

Was he, who gave me birth,

Not more than thou my father?

CORINTHIAN.

Nor to him

Owest thou thy birth; no, nor to me.

OEDIPUS.

Why then

Did he avow me as his son?

CORINTHIAN.

A gift.

He from my hands received thee.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

And ſuch love
Bore to an infant from another's hands
Received!

CORINTHIAN.

To this his former childleſs ſtate
Induced him.

OEDIPUS.

Was I purchaſed with thy gold,
Or to thee born?

CORINTHIAN.

Amidſt the boſky dales
Beneath Cithæron found.

OEDIPUS.

To thoſe retreats
What led thy devious ſteps?

CORINTHIAN.

I kept the herds
That o'er the mountain range.

OEDIPUS.

An herdſman thou
For hire?

CORINTHIAN.

And thy preſerver at that time.

OEDIPUS.

What ſufferings didſt thou find me in that ſtate
Of ills ſuſtaining?

CORIN-

CORINTHIAN.

Theſe thy wounded feet
Would evidence.

OEDIPUS.

Ah, why recall this ill
Of days long paſs'd!

CORINTHIAN.

I looſe thy feet pierced through,
And bound together.

OEDIPUS.

Barbarous were the wrongs
My infancy endured.

CORINTHIAN.

And hence thy name
From theſe thy ſufferings given thee.

OEDIPUS.

By the gods
Was this my father's, or my mother's deed?

CORINTHIAN.

I know not: he knows beſt from whom my hands
Received thee.

OEDIPUS.

Was I then from other hands
By thee received, not found by chance?

CORINTHIAN.

To me
Another herdſman gave thee.

OEDIPUS.

Who that man?

Canſt thou inform me?

CORINTHIAN.

Of the menial train

Of Laius.

OEDIPUS.

What, of him who once o'er Thebes

Reign'd king?

CORINTHIAN.

Of him; and herdſman to that king.

OEDIPUS.

Is he, that I may ſee him, yet alive?

CORINTHIAN.

You, in this country who reſide, beſt know.

OEDIPUS.

Is there among you, that are ſtanding here,

One, who the herdſman by him mention'd knows,

Seen in the fields or city? Make him known:

The time demands theſe things ſhould be made clear.

CHORUS.

I think he means none other, but the man

Whom from the fields long ſince thou haſt deſired

To ſee: none better than Jocaſta knows.

OEDIPUS.

Knoweſt thou, lady, him we wiſh'd to come

To be the man of whom this ſtranger ſpeaks?

JOCASTA.

Who—ſpeak of whom?—Regard him not, nor wiſh
On words at random utter'd e'en to think.

OEDIPUS.

What, ſhall ſuch traces of my birth appear,
And I not follow them? It may not be.

JOCASTA.

Oh, by the gods enquire not, if thy life
Be dear to thee! Enough that I am wretched.

OEDIPUS.

Be chear'd: for were I thrice a ſlave, and thrice
My mothers ſlaves, thence no diſgrace were thine.

JOCASTA.

Yet let my prayers prevail; this ſearch forbear.

OEDIPUS.

No pray'rs ſhall move me: I will be inform'd.

JOCASTA.

I have ſtrong cauſe: I warn thee for thy peace.

OEDIPUS.

My peace that cauſe, whate'er it be, deſtroys.

JOCASTA.

Never, oh never may'ſt thou know thy birth!

L. 1109. Jocaſta was now acquainted with the dreadful ſecret; ſhe could not prevail upon Oedipus to forbear further enquiry; ſhe could not be preſent at the diſcovery to him; ſhe could not ſuſtain theſe horrors; ſhe haſtens to put an end to her wretched life: her words, as ſhe quits the ſcene, are conciſe and obſcure, but alarming: they ſpeak to the heart more powerfully than all the pomp of eloquence could have done.

OEDIPUS.

Go ſome one, bring this herdſman to me, haſte;
And let her glory in her noble birth.

JOCASTA.

Alas, ill-fated man! for by that name
Alone, ah me! can I addreſs thee now,
And by none other ever from this hour.

CHORUS.

Ah, whither is the queen with haſty ſtep
Fled, pierced with anguiſh? From this ſilence great
My fear, leſt ſomething dreadful ſhould burſt forth.

OEDIPUS.

Burſt forth what may, my ſoul is bent to know,
Mean though it be, my race: but ſhe perchance
(For, as a woman, lofty are her thoughts)
Looks with diſdain on my ignoble birth.
I am the ſon of Fortune: while ſhe ſmiles,
I ſhall not be diſgraced: my mother ſhe,
The Months, my kindſmen, have deſign'd me mean,
And great: thus born, no other can I be,
Nor will I ever bluſh to know my race.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

If a prophet's ſoul be mine
Aught illumed with ſkill divine,
By Olympus' ſacred height,
Ere the morning's ſtreaming light

Thou,

Thou, Cithæron, ſhalt unfold
All this myſtery round thee roll'd,
And with pride and triumph own
Oedipus thy foſter'd ſon.
Then with joy would we advance,
Leading light the feſtive dance;
Teach thy woods with joy to ring,
And with tranſport hail our king.
Glorious with thy ſilver bow,
Phœbus, theſe our joys allow!

ANTISTROPHE.

Who, of all the heav'nly pow'rs,
Gave thee birth in theſe cloſe bow'rs?
Some bright Nymph of ſylvan race
Did the frolic Pan embrace,
Wand'ring o'er the mountain's brow?
Or to Phœbus doſt thou owe
Thy birth? For him the craggy height,
Him the paſtured dales delight.
Or to him, the god who roves
Through Cyllene's cypreſs groves?
Or did Bacchus, wont to tread,
His loved haunt, the mountain's head,
Thee receive, confeſs'd his ſon,
From the Nymphs of Helicon?
Raptured with their tuneful ſtrain
Sportive oft he joins their train.

OEDIPUS.

If I, who converſe never with him held,
May from appearance, reverend ſages, judge,
I ſee th' expected herdſman; for his years
Accord, denoting him of equal age
With this Corinthian; more than this, I know
They, who conduct him, to my menial train
Belong: with more aſſurance thou may'ſt ſpeak,
As haply thou haſt ſeen this groom before.

CHORUS.

I know him well; to Laius in his charge
As herdſman none more faithful was eſteem'd.

OEDIPUS.

Stranger of Corinth, I would aſk thee firſt,
Of this man didſt thou ſpeak?

CORINTHIAN.

This is the man.

OEDIPUS, CORINTHIAN, HERDSMAN, CHORUS.

OEDIPUS.

Hither, old man; look up; to what I aſk,
Anſwer. To Laius didſt thou once belong?

HERDSMAN.

I was his ſlave, but not a purchaſed ſlave,
My birth was in his houſe.

OEDIPUS.

Thine office what?
What was thy life?

HERDS-

HERDSMAN.

Paſs'd chiefly on his herds

Attending.

OEDIPUS.

To what paſtures didſt thou drive
Thy charge?

HERDSMAN.

Around Cithæron, and the tracts
Adjoining to the mountain.

OEDIPUS.

Doſt thou know
This man? Didſt thou e'er ſee him?

HERDSMAN.

Of what deed,
What man is thy enquiry?

OEDIPUS.

Of this man
Now preſent: commerce with him haſt thou held?

HERDSMAN.

My memory fails; I cannot ſpeak at once.

CORINTHIAN.

No wonder, lord; but I will ſoon recall
Things to his memory loſt; for well I know
He muſt remember in Cithæron's vales,
When of two herds the charge was his, and mine
Of one, I neighbour'd with him three whole months,
From ſpring till cold Arcturus with him brings

The

The winter; to their ſtalls I then drove back
My herds, and he to thoſe of Laius his.
Have I ſaid aught but truth and real fact?

HERDSMAN.

Theſe things are true, though facts of diſtant times.

CORINTHIAN.

Say then, doſt thou remember that a child
Thou gaveſt me there to nurture as mine own?

HERDSMAN.

What wou'dſt thou? Wherefore is that queſtion aſk'd?

CORINTHIAN.

This, my good friend, is he who was that child.

HERDSMAN.

Perdition ſeize thee; wilt thou hold thy peace?

OEDIPUS.

Ah, thou doſt wrong: rebuke him not, old man;
For more than his thy words deſerve rebuke.

HERDSMAN.

In what, moſt worthy lord, do I offend?

OEDIPUS.

To what concerns this child, of which he aſks,
Replying not.

HERDSMAN.

He ſpeaks he knows not what,
Mere idle talk.

OEDIPUS.

Thou wilt not with good grace
Speak freely; but the truth thou wilt declare
Writhing beneath the ſcourge.

HERDSMAN.

Oh, by the gods,
Scourge not an old man!

OEDIPUS.

Seize him, bind his hands
This inſtant.

HERDSMAN.

Wretched me! And for what cauſe?
What woud'ſt thou know?

OEDIPUS.

This child, of which he aſks,
Didſt thou conſign it to his hands?

HERDSMAN.

I did.
Would I had died that day!

OEDIPUS.

And thou ſhalt die,
Unleſs thou ſpeak the truth.

HERDSMAN.

And if I ſpeak,
I muſt be more undone.

OEDIPUS.

This man, it ſeems,
Is ſtudious of delay.

HERDSMAN.

Not ſo: I ſaid
Long ſince I gave it to him.

OEDIPUS.

Whence received?
Thine own, or from ſome other?

HERDSMAN.

Not mine own,
But from another's hand.

OEDIPUS.

From whom? from one
That dwells at Thebes?

HERDSMAN.

Now by the gods, O king,
Enquire no more.

OEDIPUS.

If I muſt aſk again,
Thou dieſt.

HERDSMAN.

Beneath the roof of Laius born.

OEDIPUS.

Born to a ſlave? Or drew he from the king
His birth?

HERDSMAN.

HERDSMAN.

For me how terrible to ſpeak!

OEDIPUS.

Ay, and for me to hear: yet I muſt hear.

HERDSMAN.

The ſon of Laius he was call'd; of this
Thy queen, Jocaſta, can inform thee beſt.

OEDIPUS.

Gave ſhe the child to thee?

HERDSMAN.

She did, O king.

OEDIPUS.

With what intent?

HERDSMAN.

By me to be deſtroy'd.

OEDIPUS.

What, ſhe who gave him birth! O wretch!

HERDSMAN.

Through dread
Of oracles denouncing ill.

OEDIPUS.

What ill?

HERDSMAN.

That he ſhould kill his parents: this was ſaid.

OEDIPUS.

Why then to this old man conſign thy charge?

HERDSMAN.

Through pity: for, my lord, I thought this man
Would bear him to a diſtant land, of which
He is a native; but he ſaved him, ſaved
To miſery: for if thou art he, of whom
He ſpeaks, know this, moſt wretched is thy fate.

OEDIPUS.

Is there a wretch like me? My dreadful fate
Is now unveil'd. O light, thy beams no more
Let me behold, for I derive my birth
From theſe, to whom my birth I ſhould not owe;
My deareſt commerce I have held with thoſe,
Whoſe commerce nature ſtarts at; I have ſlain
Thoſe, from whoſe blood the fouleſt ſtain I draw.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Ye race of mortals, what your ſtate?
Life I an airy nothing deem.
For what, ah! what your happieſt fate,
More than light fancy's high-wrought dream?
How ſoon thoſe baſeleſs dreams decay
And all the glittering viſions melt away!
Whilſt thy example, hapleſs king,
Thy life, thy fortune I bewail,
Happy no man of mortal birth I hail.
Thine was no vulgar fate: its tow'ring wing

To

To wealth, and empire's ſplendid ſummit ſoar'd:
When, ſilenced her myſterious lore,
The harpy-talon'd monſter ſcream'd no more,
Our bulwark thou againſt that peſt abhor'd,
Thebes gave her ſceptre to thy honour'd hand,
And hail'd thee monarch of a mighty land.

ANTISTROPHE.

Who now is pierced with keener pain?
To all thy glories bid farewell:
They fly, and in their ſtead a train
Of miſeries croud with thee to dwell.
To one great port, illuſtrious king,
Their gallant barks the ſon and father bring;
But ſink in wild waves roaring round.
How could thy father's bed ſo long,
Ah, how in ſilence bear the horrid wrong!
But thee th' all-ſeeing eye of time hath found,
And theſe unhallow'd rites abhorrent ſhows.
O ſon of Laius, ne'er again,
Ne'er could my ſorrowing heart thy ſight ſuſtain:
Yet I lament in mournful ſtrains thy woes,
By thee 't was mine to life, to light, to riſe;
By thee in dark deſpair to cloſe my eyes.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

Ye ever-honour'd rulers of this land,
What deeds are you to hear, what to behold,

What

What grief to ſuffer, if you yet revere,
As Thebans ought, the houſe of Labdacus!
Not all the cleanſing ſtreams that Iſter rolls,
Or Phaſis, the pollutions of this houſe
Can waſh away: as yet they lie conceal'd;
But ſoon the dreadful deeds will burſt to light,
Deeds not of force, but choice: with keeneſt pangs
Ills ſelf-inflicted rend the tortured heart.

CHORUS.

No weight was wanting to the ills we knew
Before: what bring'ſt thou now to grieve us more?

MESSENGER.

What ſooneſt may be ſpoken, ſooneſt heard,
Take briefly, the revered Jocaſta's dead.

CHORUS.

Unhappy queen! And what the fatal cauſe?

MESSENGER.

That from her ſelf aroſe: but of theſe deeds
The greateſt grief is wanting, for no eye
Beheld them; yet, as far as memory prompts,
Her heart-corroding ſufferings thou ſhalt know.
Soon as the portal ſhe had paſs'd, with woes
Diſtracted to her nuptial bed ſhe ruſh'd
Rending her hair, and entering barr'd the doors:
On Laius long ſince dead ſhe calls, and makes
Sad mention of the ſeed announced of old,
By which he died, and left her to produce

Unhallow'd offspring, at which nature ſtarts.
Her nuptial bed with anguiſh ſhe bewail'd,
Where from her huſband huſbands ſhe brought forth,
And ſons from ſons. How, after this, ſhe died
I know not, for with loud laments, and pace
Impetuous in ruſh'd Oedipus: her ills
Our thoughts no more engaged, for all our eyes
Were fix'd on him; he, hurrying on, demands
A ſword; his wife he ſeeks, and not his wife,
His mother, and the mother of his ſons.
Him raving thus ſome evil dæmon ſhows,
What not a man there preſent would declare,
Where he might find her; with a dreadful cry,
As by ſome impulſe, 'gainſt the folding doors
He ruſh'd, and all the ſolid bolts beat down,
Then burſt into the chamber; there he ſaw
His wife, but breathleſs now, around her neck
The wreathed cord: at this unhappy ſight
Deeply he groan'd, and looſed the ſtrangling nooſe.
When on the floor the wretched corſe was laid,
The golden claſps, with which ſhe was adorn'd,
He from her veſtments ſnatch'd, then, dreadful deed!
Raiſed high his hand, and plunged their piercing points
Deep in his orbs of ſight, exclaiming thus,
That her no more they ſhould behold, his woes,
His horrid deeds no more; but henceforth dark
Nor ſee whom it beſeem'd him not to ſee,
Nor thoſe, with whom he ſhould have converſe, know.

Thus

Thus oft exclaiming he his eyelids raiſed,
And rent the orbs of ſight; the bleeding balls
Imbath'd his cheeks, nor ceaſed the guſhing drops,
But rain'd a ſhow'r of black and ſtreaming gore.
This the unhappy fate of both, the woes
Of wife and huſband blended dreadfully.
Their former happineſs, with ample right
Of old call'd happineſs, is now, this day,
Misfortune, lamentation, death, diſgrace,
And all the names that miſery ever knew.

CHORUS.

And hath he yet no reſpite from his ills?

MESSENGER.

He cries aloud, open the doors, and ſhow
This murderer of his father, ſhow to Thebes
This murderer of his mother; uttering words
Unholy, not by me to be expreſs'd;
That he no longer will inhabit here,
But caſt himſelf an exile from this land,
By his own curſe devoted: yet a guide
He wants, and ſtrength; for more than he can bear
Are his afflictions. But to thee he ſoon
Will ſhow himſelf; the bolts, that cloſe theſe doors,
Are opening; now ſhalt thou behold a ſight,
At which with pity e'en a foe would melt.

OEDIPUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

O miſery, horrible to human ſight,

Moſt

Moſt horrible of all that e'er theſe eyes
Beheld! What madneſs, O unhappy man,
What dæmon ſeized thee, to thy wretched fate
Adding this extreme agony of woe?
Alas thy ſufferings! But I cannot bear
To look on thee, (though much I wiſh to aſk,
Of much to be inform'd, and much to ſee)
Such ſhuddering horror ſtrikes me at thy ſight.

OEDIPUS.

Woe, woe, woe, woe! O miſerable me!
Wretch that I am, ah, whither am I borne?
Whoſe ears do now my cries of anguiſh reach?
To what are thy decrees, O fortune, changed!

CHORUS.

To horrors, which nor eye nor ear can bear.

OEDIPUS.

Ah me, this cloud of darkneſs thick'ning round,
Hateful, beyond expreſſion, beyond cure,
And beyond hope! Ah me, how keen the ſting
Of frenzy, and the memory of my ills!

CHORUS.

No marvel if in ſufferings great as thine
Redoubled ills bring on redoubled woes.

OEDIPUS.

Thou art a friend, yet ſtedfaſt, faithful yet;
Thy care, thy kind attention yet remains

E'en to the blind. I know thee, though mine eyes
Are dark, diſtinctly know thee, and thy voice.

CHORUS.

Dreadful thy deeds: how haſt thou dared thine eyes
To mangle thus? What god enforced this rage?

OEDIPUS.

This was the work of Phœbus: O my friends,
Phœbus accompliſh'd all my ills, my woes.
With his own hands no man e'er rent his eyes,
But I unhappy. Why ſhould I have ſight,
Since, had I eyes, nought pleaſant could I ſee?

CHORUS.

Mournful theſe truths, and juſt are thy complaints.

OEDIPUS.

What now is left me to be ſeen, or loved,
Addreſs'd, or heard with pleaſure? O my friends,
Drive hence, my friends, quick from your country drive
This peſtilent deſtroyer, moſt accurſed,
Of mortal men, moſt hateful to the gods.

CHORUS.

Unhappy in thy ills, and in the ſenſe
Of theſe thy ills, oh that I ne'er had known thee!

OEDIPUS.

Periſh the man, who in the rural dale
Unbound my feet, and from deſtruction ſnatch'd
(To me no kindneſs) ſaved the helpleſs child:

For had I periſh'd then, this had not been,
This miſery to my ſelf, and to my friends.

CHORUS.

Oh that to thee ſuch fate had been aſſign'd!

OEDIPUS.

Hither I had not come this guilty wretch,
The murderer of my father, nor been call'd
Huſband to thoſe who gave me birth. But now,
Sprung from unhallow'd parents, giving ſons
To thoſe whoſe ſon I am, what woes are mine!
And if 'midſt ills there be an heavier ill,
With all its weight it falls on Oedipus.

CHORUS.

Thy counſils cannot claim my praiſe as wiſe;
For better not to be, than to live blind.

OEDIPUS.

If what is done I have not wiſely done,
Inſtruct me now, and counſel me no more.
I know not with what eyes in Pluto's realm
I could behold my father, had I ſight,
Or my unhappy mother: theſe dark orbs,
Theſe deeds are better than the ſtrangling cord.
But to behold my children's opening bloom,
As I beheld them bloom, muſt be a ſight
Much to be wiſh'd: no, never to my eyes;
Nor e'en this city, nor its rampired tow'rs,
Nor the revered forms of its ſculptured gods,

Of which I, once of all the ſons of Thebes
Moſt glorious, have deprived my ſelf, my voice
Injoining all an outcaſt hence to chaſe
This wretch unhallow'd, by the gods declared
Impure, and from the blood of Laius ſprung.
This impious ſtain diſcloſed, could e'er my eyes
Dare unaverted look on theſe again?
No: could I ſtop the fount of hearing too,
Without remorſe from this unhappy frame
Would I ſhut out its entrance, that nor eye
Nor ear might aught perceive; for ſweet the life
That glides away without the ſenſe of ills.
Me, O Cithæron, why didſt thou receive,
Or when received not inſtantly deſtroy,
That whence my birth I never might have ſhown?
O Polybus, O Corinth, and the houſe
Once call'd my father's, what a ſeemly form
Of glory, covering ills that rankled deep,
In me you cheriſh'd, for I now am found
Vile, and my birth deriving from the vile!
O ye three ways, ye ſecret dells, thou grove,
And, where the three ways meet, thou narrow path,
Who drank my father's blood ſhed by theſe hands,
Yet, do you yet remember me, what deeds
I did among you, then what deeds again
I here committed? O ye nuptials, O
Ye nuptials, you produced this plant, then gave
To the ſame ſoil the ſame ſeed back, and ſhow'd

Fathers,

Fathers, ſons, brothers, ſtreams of kindred blood,
Siſters, wives, mothers, and whatever deeds
'Mongſt men are deem'd moſt vile. But, ſince the deeds
Shameful in act not well beſeem the tongue,
Quick, by the gods, in ſome far diſtant place
Hide me, or kill me, or beneath the ſea
Hurl me to ſink for ever. Come, my friends,
Diſdain not an unhappy man to touch;
Let me prevail; why ſhould you fear? my ills
Of all mankind none but my ſelf can bear.

CHORUS.

But Creon comes, at thy requeſt to grant,
By counſil or by deed, whate'er is right:
He now is left ſole ſovereign of this land.

OEDIPUS.

To him how can I ſpeak? from him what grace
With juſtice can I hope? for he before
Found me injurious, and in all things vile.

CREON, OEDIPUS, CHORUS.

CREON.

I come not to inſult thee, Oedipus,
Nor to reproach thee for thy former wrongs.
But you, reſpecting mortals if you feel
No touch of ſhame, revere th' all-feeding flame
Of yon imperial ſun; nor thus expoſe
Unveil'd ſuch dire pollution, which nor earth,
Nor ſacred water, nor heav'n's light receives.
But quickly bear him hence, beneath this roof

Conceal'd;

Conceal'd; for piety demands that thoſe
By blood allied alone ſhould ſee, ſhould hear
The ills of thoſe from the ſame blood derived.

OEDIPUS.

Now by the gods, ſince all my fears from thee
Thou haſt rent from me, and benevolent
Comeſt to a wretch thus vile, grant me one grace:
What I ſhall aſk concerns thy good, not mine.

CREON.

Of me thus warmly what wou'dſt thou requeſt?

OEDIPUS.

With all ſpeed caſt me from this land, where ne'er
With mortal man I may hold converſe more.

CREON.

That I would grant, be thou aſſured; but firſt
Behoves me what the god requires to know.

OEDIPUS.

Long ſince have all his dictates been declared,
This parricide, this monſter to deſtroy.

CREON.

Theſe things have been declared; but better now
In this our ſtate to learn what muſt be done.

OEDIPUS.

For ſuch a wretch wilt thou conſult the god?

CREON.

Thy fate hath taught us to revere his truth.

OEDIPUS.

I charge thee, I conjure thee, in a tomb,
Such as thou wilt, place her who in the houſe
Lies dead: ſo near allied, this office well
Becomes thy care. But never may this town,
Seat of my fathers, deign to let me live
Within its walls; but ſuffer me to dwell
On thoſe wild mountains, my Cithæron call'd:
My father and my mother, when alive,
My tomb appointed there; there let me die,
Where they deſign'd my death; for well I know
That nor diſeaſe, nor aught beſides to man
Moſt hurtful, could deſtroy me; nor from death
Had I been ſaved, but for ſome dreadful ill:
Let my ill fate then go, where it will go.
But I have children, Creon; on my ſons
Thy anxious care employ not; they are men,
And never ſhall their lives, where'er they are,
Feel the diſtreſs of pinching penury.
But for my poor lamented daughters, left
In virgin helpleſſneſs, from whom apart
My table ne'er was ſpread, o'er whom has ſtream'd
The ſweet effuſion of a father's love,
Of them take tender care; and this warm wiſh
Indulge me, let me touch them with my hands,
And o'er them wail their ills: go then, O king,
Generous and noble by thy lineage, go:
If with my hands I touch them, I ſhall think

I hold

I hold them now, as when I look'd on them
With eyes of fondneſs.—Ah, am I deceived?
Or near me my loved children do I hear,
Hear I their grief? Now, Creon, by the gods,
Didſt thou in pity to the father ſend
Theſe deareſt pledges to me? Speak I truth?

CREON.

Thou doſt: thy former fondneſs well I knew,
And my attention gave thee this delight.

OEDIPUS.

Oh, be thou bleſs'd; and for this courteſy
A kinder guardian may'ſt thou find the god
Than I have found him!—O my children, where,
Where are you? Come to me, come to theſe hands,
A brother's hands, which thus your father's eyes,
Once lamps of light, have quench'd. Your father I
(Alas, my children! erring, nor by ſight
Nor thought inform'd) by her that gave me birth.
Yet I weep o'er you, for theſe eyes no more
Can ſee you, thinking on the cruel griefs
Which muſt embitter all your life, I weep.
To the bright circles of aſſembled dames
How will you go? Or how on feſtive days
To the throng'd theatre, returning home
More than each ſpectacle of tragic woe
Lamented there? But when your blooming age
Leads on the nuptial hour, who is the man,

My

My children, that will lead you to his houſe,
Regardleſs of the infamy which marks
My parents, and devolves the ſtain on you?
Interminable ills! Your father kill'd
His father, mounted then his mother's bed,
And gave you, whence he drew his own, your birth.
With infamy you thus will be reproach'd:
What youth will wed you then? Alas, not one:
Neglected, O my children, muſt you waſte
In chearleſs ſolitude your lives away.—
Son of Menœceus, ſince alone to theſe
A father thou art left (for we, who were
Their parents, are no more) neglect them not,
They are allied to thee, let them not roam
Unhuſbanded, unfriended, and to want
Expoſed, nor let their miſeries equal mine:
Have pity on them, for their helpleſs age
Thou ſeeſt, by all abandon'd, ſave what reſts
On thee: aſſent then, O thou generous man,
And pledge thy hand.—To you once more I turn,
My children: to inſtruction were your age
Mature, much admonition on your minds
Would I enforce: but now I can no more
Than pour this pray'r, where'er your lot to live
That happier than your father's be your lives.

CREON.

Enough of tears: but enter now the houſe.

OEDIPUS.

I muſt, howe'er unwillingly, obey.

CREON.

All things in ſeaſon have their proper grace.

OEDIPUS.

Know'ſt thou my warm wiſh now?

CREON.

That wiſh declare.

OEDIPUS.

Me from this land an out-caſt that thou drive.

CREON.

Thou aſk'ſt what is the god's, not mine, to grant.

OEDIPUS.

I am a wretch deteſted by the gods.

CREON.

Then ſoon perchance thy wiſh thou may'ſt obtain.

OEDIPUS.

Speak'ſt thou the truth?

CREON.

It is not mine to ſpeak
With falſehood what is foreign to my thought.

OEDIPUS.

Now lead me hence.

CREON.

Thy children muſt be left.

OEDIPUS.

Take them not all, Oh take not all away.

CREON.

Be not deſirous all things to obtain.
Weigh what is paſs'd: for what thou haſt obtain'd,
Falſe to thy hopes, attends thee not through life.

CHORUS.

Inhabitants of Thebes, my native ſtate,
Behold your Oedipus, whoſe piercing mind
Solved the deſtructive monſter's myſtic charm,
Once your moſt potent, moſt illuſtrious chief,
To fortune and the people's favouring voice
Superior, by tranſcendent merit raiſed
To his high ſtate; behold him now how fallen,
How ſunk beneath a flood of dreadful woes!
See this, and, mortal as thou art, ſurvey
Man's laſt deciding day, and none pronounce
Happy, the bounds of life till he hath paſs'd
Safe, and uninjured by the ſtorms of fate.



OEDIPUS AT COLONUS.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS.

THE illuſtrious but unhappy Oedipus is here repreſented as old and blind, driven from his realms, reduced to extreme indigence, and wandering into a foreign country where he is deſtined to die. The unſhaken fortitude of his ſoul, and the ſedate dignity which he ſuſtains under his afflictions, command our reverence; and we feel as deep, perhaps a deeper concern for the Exile at Colonus, than we felt for the Monarch at Thebes. Antigone, with a chearful and unremitting aſſiduity, attends her father through all his wanderings, guides his ſteps, begs for him his daily food, and mitigates his ſorrows; ſhe is the moſt perfect example of tender affection and filial piety. Her ſiſter Iſmene bears not ſo conſiderable a part in this drama, but ſhe appears in the ſame amiable light. An Athenian audience muſt be highly pleaſed with a repreſentation of their Hero Theſeus, whoſe open and generous character is finely contraſted with that of the inſidious and unfeeling Creon. Though a ſoft melancholy is diffuſed through moſt of the ſcenes of this drama, and Pity is the paſſion to which they in general apply, yet there are ſome of a ſtronger and a rougher nature; Oedipus is not to die like vulgar mortals; the fate of kingdoms depends upon his death, and it is attended with circumſtances of ſublime conception which awe and terrify.

The Scene is beautifully deſcribed by Antigone at the opening of the drama, and again by the Chorus in their firſt ode.

Perſons of the Drama.

OEDIPUS.
CREON.
THESEUS.
POLYNICES.
ANTIGONE.
ISMENE.
A COLONIATE.
CHORUS, Magiſtrates of COLONUS.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

OEDIPUS.

TELL me, thou daughter of a blind old man,
Antigone, to what land are we come,
Or to what city? Who th' inhabitants?
Who with a ſlender pittance will relieve,
E'en for the day, the wandering Oedipus?
I aſk indeed but little, and receive
Leſs than that little; yet for me e'en that
Suffices; my afflictions, the long courſe
Of years ſo paſs'd, and fortitude of ſoul
Teach me with chearfulneſs to bear my ills.
But, O my daughter, ſome one if thou ſeeſt
Or in the ſacred groves, or on the ſeats
Not hallow'd, lead me thither, place me there,
That in what land we are we may enquire;

For of the natives, ſtrangers as we are,
We come to learn, and as inſtructed act.

ANTIGONE.

My father, woe-enduring Oedipus,
Tow'rs, the ſtrong bulwarks of ſome city, riſe
In diſtant view. This place, if right I judge,
Is ſacred, flouriſhing with laurels, vines,
And olives cloſe enwoven; in the midſt
Thick-fluttering nightingales their ſweet notes tune.
Reſt therefore ſeated on this unhewn ſtone,
For tireſome to thine age the length of way.

OEDIPUS.

Then ſeat me there, and guide a blind old man.

ANTIGONE.

That tender office length of time hath made
Familiar to me.

OEDIPUS.

What the place, where now
We reſt our ſteps? Canſt thou inform me?

ANTIGONE.

Well
I know we tread Athenian ground; the place
I know not.

OEDIPUS.

From each paſſing traveller
Of that we are inform'd.

ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE.

Wilt thou I go,
And what the place enquire?

OEDIPUS.

Such is my wiſh,
If near us it hath habitants, my child.

ANTIGONE.

It is inhabited: but that I go
Needs not; for near us I behold a man.

OEDIPUS.

Doth he advance, and hither ſpeed his ſteps?

ANTIGONE.

He is e'en preſent; what th' occaſion then
Prompts thee to ſay, ſpeak, for the man is here.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, A COLONIATE.

OEDIPUS.

Stranger, I hear from her who ſees for me
And for her ſelf, that thou in happy hour
Art come to teach us what we wiſh to know.

COLONIATE.

Ere thou ſpeak more, come from that ſeat; the place,
That holds thee now, is hallow'd from thy tread.

OEDIPUS.

What is the place then, ſacred to what god?

COLONIATE.

Nor touch, nor habitation dares profane

That place; for there the dreadful goddeſſes,
Daughters of Earth and Night, have their abode.

OEDIPUS.

Them by what aweful name ſhould I invoke?

COLONIATE.

This people call them the Eumenides,
The all-beholding pow'rs: in other realms
By other honour'd names they are revered.

OEDIPUS.

Their ſupplicant propitious may theſe pow'rs
Receive; that never from their ſeat here fix'd
I may henceforth depart!

COLONIATE.

What may this mean?

OEDIPUS.

It is the ſign which ratifies my fate.

COLONIATE.

Nay, hence I dare not move thee, till I ſhow
The mandate of the city how to act.

OEDIPUS.

Now by the gods diſdain not to inform
E'en ſuch a wanderer what I wiſh to aſk.

COLONIATE.

Speak; thou ſhalt find that I diſdain thee not.

OEDIPUS.

What is this place, which now our feet hath reach'd?

COLONIATE.

Whate'er I know, attend, and thou ſhalt hear.
Sacred is all this place, for Neptune here
Is lord revered; and he, who bears the fire,
Prometheus the Titanian: but the ground
Beneath thy feet is call'd the brazen way,
Which forms the firm baſe of th' Athenian tow'rs.
The fields adjoining glory in their Chief,
Colonus the Equeſtrian; and from him
All bear their common name. I tell thee things,
O ſtranger, not by fame alone renown'd,
But by conſent of ages honour'd more.

OEDIPUS.

Are there theſe places who inhabit?

COLONIATE.

Here
Are many habitants, and from this god
They take their name.

OEDIPUS.

O'er theſe who bears command?
Or in the people is the pow'r?

L. 65. When Ouranus was dethroned and mutilated by Saturn, he called his other ſons together, and charged them to avenge his wrongs. The combined brothers, among whom was Iapetus, became very formidable to Saturn, and afterwards to Jupiter; theſe, and the whole party, were named Titanes, from Titan, the eldeſt ſon of Ouranus, who acted as their Chief. From Iapetus this appellation deſcended to his ſon Prometheus; who is here with peculiar propriety ſtiled πυρφόρος θεὸς, becauſe, as we are told by Pauſanias, the youths, who contended in the race called ἀγὼν λαμπαδοῦχος, lighted their torches at his altar here mentioned, and ran towards the city.

COLONIATE.

COLONIATE.

This place
Is govern'd by the king, whoſe royal ſeat
Is in the city.

OEDIPUS.

What his name, who holds
The ſovereign pow'r?

COLONIATE.

The noble Theſeus, ſon
Of Ægeus late our king.

OEDIPUS.

Would one of you
A meſſage to him bear?

COLONIATE.

With what report,
Or what inſtructions charged?

OEDIPUS.

That for his aid,
A little aid, he much may gain.

COLONIATE.

What gain
From one of ſight bereaved?

OEDIPUS.

What I ſhall ſpeak
Shall all be found to have the pow'r of ſight.

COLONIATE.

Stranger, I would not thou ſhou'dſt err: but ſince

Noble

Noble is thy appearance, ſave the wrongs
Of fortune, where I ſaw thee firſt, remain,
Till I ſeek thoſe who have their dwelling here,
Not in the city, and relate theſe things.
For they will judge if here thou may'ſt remain,
Or from this place behoves thee to depart.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

OEDIPUS.

My daughter, hath the ſtranger left this place?

ANTIGONE.

He hath; and unmoleſted thou may'ſt ſpeak
Whate'er thou wilt, for I am here alone.

OEDIPUS.

Ye aweful goddeſſes, of aſpect ſtern,
Since in this country on your ſeats I firſt
Reſted my limbs, to Phœbus and to me
Be not ungentle; for when all thoſe ills
To me his voice oracular declared,
This reſt he in the length of time announced,
When to the deſtined country I ſhould come,
And place me in the hoſpitable ſeat
Of theſe tremendous pow'rs, there to lay down
My weary life; ſucceſs and fame to thoſe,
Whoſe grace received me, doom'd to bring; to thoſe,
Who caſt me out, diſcomfiture and ſhame.
Signs, theſe events confirming, he foretold,
The rocking of the earth, the thunder's roar,

Or

Or Jove's red lightening: therefore well I know
None other but your faithful auſpice led
My footſteps to this grove: I had not elſe
Firſt, as I journey'd, chanced to light on you
From wine abhorrent, pure my ſelf from wine,
And place me in your aweful unhewn ſeat.
Then, goddeſſes, ſince thus Apollo's voice
Hath deſtined, grant me now to end my life;
Unleſs too light you deem the woes I bear,
More than all mortals though to ills enſlaved.
Come then, ſweet daughters of primæval Night,
And thou, who from the mighty Pallas draw'ſt
Thy name, illuſtrious Athens, pity me,
Pity the ſhade of wretched Oedipus,
For what was once the man is now no more.

ANTIGONE.

Forbear: ſome men, in years they ſeem, advance:
Their purpoſe haply to obſerve thy ſeat.

OEDIPUS.

I will be ſilent; and lead thou my ſteps
Aſide into the grove; that I may learn
What their diſcourſe; this caution prompts; for hence
How to direct our conduct we may know.

CHORUS.

Who may this be? Where is he? Look around:
Where now abides he? He hath left his ſeat,
Of mortals the moſt reſtleſs. See you him?

Look

Look on each ſide; call to him; this old man
Hath roved with wandering ſteps, with wandering ſteps
Hath roved; a ſtranger ſurely; elſe he ne'er
Had enter'd, where no foot may tread, the grove
Of theſe infuriate virgins, whom we dread
To name, and awe-ſtruck paſs without a look,
Without addreſſing them, without a word,
Save what of happy omen from our mouths
Caution permits. Now we are told that one
Revering nothing hath approach'd this place.
Through all the grove I caſt my ſearching eye,
But cannot ſee where now he makes abode.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

OEDIPUS.

I am that man; for what you ſaid I heard.

CHORUS.

Horrid his aſpect, horrid is his voice.

OEDIPUS.

Nay, I beſeech you, deem me not a wretch
Profane, that bids defiance to the laws.

CHORUS.

Jove the Protector, who is this old man!

OEDIPUS.

One, whom his former fortune hath not led
To happineſs, ye rulers of this land;
In proof, I had not by another's eyes

Elſe crawl'd along, nor had this heavy frame
By a weak virgin been conducted thus.

CHORUS.

Alas, thoſe ſightleſs eyes denote thy fate
Unhappy, and thy aſpect gives me proof
That thou art old. Yet charge not on our heads,
For we are innocent, the curſe that hangs
O'er thee; for thou haſt paſs'd the bounds preſcribed;
Theſe thou haſt paſs'd: but ſet not thy raſh foot
On the freſh verdure of that aweful grove,
Where the full goblet with the fluent ſtream
Tempers the honied draught: forbear, reſtrain
Thy ſteps, ill-fated ſtranger; thence withdraw.
Wide is the ſpace between us; doſt thou hear,
Unhappy wanderer? Wou'dſt thou hold diſcourſe
With us, from that forbidden place remove;
Come to us; converſe here is free to all,
Here freely ſpeak; till then refrain thy tongue.

OEDIPUS.

Daughter, with prudence what may be reſolved?

ANTIGONE.

The judgement of the natives to regard,
And unreluctant, as behoves us, yield.
Take hold on me.

OEDIPUS.

I touch, I feel thee now.
O ſtrangers, ſince I leave this hallow'd place
In you confiding, let me not have wrong.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

From wrong thou art ſecure: nor from that ſeat
Shalt thou, old man, againſt thy will be led.

OEDIPUS.

Further muſt I come forward?

CHORUS.

Further yet.

OEDIPUS.

Yet further?

CHORUS.

Onward, virgin, guide his feet,
Thou canſt diſcern how far you muſt advance.

ANTIGONE.

Follow me, O my father, with dark ſteps
Follow where I ſhall lead thee; and reflect
Thou art a ſtranger in a foreign land;
What to the natives then is odious, hate;
And what is dear to them, with reverence treat.

OEDIPUS.

Then lead me, daughter, where our foot may tread
Offending no religion, there to ſpeak,
There hear; nor war we with Neceſſity.

CHORUS.

Stop there; nor o'er the rocky pavement ſet
Thy foot: there ſtay; enough haſt thou advanced.

OEDIPUS.

But may I ſit?

CHORUS.

On that ſtone's ſlooping top,
Gently inclining forward.

ANTIGONE.

Mine the care
Softly to guide thee ſtep by ſtep. Now bend
Thy aged body on my careful hand.

OEDIPUS.

Ah, what ſevere affliction rends my heart!

CHORUS.

Unhappy man, ſince now thy foot hath reſt,
Tell us who gave thee birth, and who thou art
Through many toils thus led; thy country what
I would enquire.

OEDIPUS.

O ſtrangers, I have none,
Outcaſt I have no country. But no more——

CHORUS.

Why doſt thou ſpeak theſe words, old man?

OEDIPUS.

No more
Aſk who I am, nor further queſtion urge.

CHORUS.

What may this be?

OEDIPUS.

A race to miſery doom'd.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Yet ſpeak.

OEDIPUS.

Ah me, how can I ſpeak, my child!

CHORUS.

Whence is thy lineage, who thy father, ſay.

OEDIPUS.

Alas, my daughter, what muſt I endure!

ANTIGONE.

Yet ſpeak, ſince now th' extreme of ills is thine.

OEDIPUS.

Then I will ſpeak; t' evade it nought avails.

CHORUS.

How irkſome your delay! Tell us with ſpeed.

OEDIPUS.

Know you one ſprung from Laius?

CHORUS.

What means this?

OEDIPUS.

Of the high race of Labdacus?

CHORUS.

O Jove!

OEDIPUS.

The wretched Oedipus?

CHORUS.

And art thou he?

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

Nay, ſtart not back through fear at what I ſay;
I am that wretch.

CHORUS.

O all ye holy gods!

OEDIPUS.

My child, what fortune will betide us now!

CHORUS.

Go hence, far hence, far from my country go.

OEDIPUS.

Where ſhall thy promiſe then its ſanction find?

CHORUS.

To none is vengeance deſtined, who repay
Wrongs firſt received; and fraud oppoſed to fraud
Brings on the firſt deceiver puniſhment,
Not grace. So then, ſince thou haſt left thoſe ſeats,
Hence with thy utmoſt ſpeed, and quit this land,
Nor further violate my country's peace.

ANTIGONE.

Strangers revering virtue, ſince your minds
Are adverſe to my father old and blind,
Hearing report of deeds to which his will
Conſented not, yet me, unhappy me,
Ye generous ſtrangers, pity; I implore
Your pity, for my father I implore,
Bluſhing as to your eyes my eyes I raiſe,

Yet

L. 231. Οὐ καλοῖς ὄμμασιν, non pulchris oculis. Οὐκ ἄλαοῖς ὄμμασιν, Ald. et MS. non cæcis

Yet as deriving from your ſource my blood,
Pray you to reverence his afflicted age:
How godlike this! On you our hopes depend.
Aſſent, refuſe not to my pray'rs this grace,
I beg by all your ſouls hold dear, your wives,
Your children, by your duty, by the god.
View mortal man, none ever will you find,
If the god force him, that can ſhun his fate.

CHORUS.

Daughter of Oedipus, be thou aſſured
We pity thee, and with his ſufferings moved
We pity him; yet, awed with holy dread,
Other than what we ſaid we dare not ſpeak.

OEDIPUS.

What then doth glory or fair fame avail,
If thus without effect it glides away?
What, that men ſay th' Athenian ſtate adores
The gods with higheſt ſanctity, alone
Hath pow'r to aid the ſtranger ſunk with ills,
Alone hath pow'r to ſave him? Where to me
Are all theſe boaſts? You drew me from thoſe ſeats,
Then drive me from your land, a name alone

cæcis oculis; which reading Dr. Burton approves. The editor of Brumoy hath explained the paſſage juſtly, "à qui l'extrémité de ſa miſére donne l'aſſurance de lever les yeux ſur "vous, contre la bienſéance de ſon ſexe:" alluding to the modeſt manners of the Grecian virgins, who never appeared unveiled before men, except ſuch as were nearly related: this is hinted at in the next line.

L. 248. The humanity of the Athenians induced them to dedicate an Altar to Pity. Pauſanias gives a pleaſing account of the philanthropy and piety of this people. Attic. Cap. 17.

And not my perſon dreading, or my deeds;
For I have ſuffer'd, but have done no wrongs.
My father and my mother, for whoſe ſake
Thou look'ſt on me with horror, if I here
Muſt mention, doth it ſhow my nature vile,
That I with force repell'd a rude aſſault?
I knew not, (had I known, e'en then no guilt
Had I incurr'd) I knew not to what height
Of ills my ſteps advanced: but they, who cauſed
My ſufferings, knowingly my ruin wrought.
By the gods then, O ſtrangers, I implore
Your faith; ſince thence you drew me, ſave, O ſave
Your ſupplicant; nor, honouring the gods,
Neglect the gods: not ſo: but be aſſured
The pious they behold, and they behold
The impious too; nor ſhall th' unhallow'd wretch
Ever eſcape: then dim not thou with theſe
The luſtre of bleſt Athens, lending aid
To deeds unhallow'd. As thou haſt received
Thy ſupplicant confiding in thy faith,
Protect me, ſave me; nor, this grieſly form
Beholding, treat me with indignity;
Sacred and pious ſince I hither came,
And much advantage to this people bring.
When your lord comes, whoe'er your ſovereign be,
Full information ſhall be thine; meanwhile
Be not ungentle, do not work me ill.

CHORUS.

Thy pleaded reaſon with great force, old man,
Commands reſpect; nor briefly is it urged.
And it contents me well that on theſe things
The rulers of the land for me decide.

OEDIPUS.

Where, ſtranger, is the ſovereign of theſe realms?

CHORUS.

In his paternal city: but the man,
Who ſaw thee firſt and ſent me, hath in charge
To haſten with theſe tidings to the king.

OEDIPUS.

And think you he will hold a blind old man
Worthy his care, and hither deign to come?

CHORUS.

Inſtant, as ſoon as he ſhall hear thy name.

OEDIPUS.

Of this who ſhall inform him?

CHORUS.

Long the way
Which

L. 280. This implies a cenſure. In the virtuous ſimplicity of thoſe times eloquence and all attempts to move the paſſions were forbidden by the Athenian laws: the Chorus appeared here as Magiſtrates; they had even pronounced ſentence, but Oedipus appealed to the king, in which they acquieſce. Nay in all caſes that people as yet required a plain and conciſe narrative. Oedipus ſeems to have profited by the rebuke; for in his anſwer to the firſt addreſs of Theſeus he ſays

Thy generous ſpirit, Theſeus, in few words
Shines forth; behoves me then a brief reply.

L. 290. As Oedipus had not declared his name to the Coloniate whom the Chorus had

diſpatched

Which thou haſt paſs'd; and travellers ſpread quick
Their free reports; by theſe inform'd he ſoon,
Be confident, will come; for much thy name
Hath 'mongſt us all been ſounded: it will add
Speed to his ſteps, and he will ſoon be here.

OEDIPUS.

And happy be his coming to his ſtate,
Happy to me! Why ſhould not a good man
Be to himſelf a friend?

ANTIGONE.

Immortal Jove!
What ſhould I ſay? Thoughts, whither do you lead?.

OEDIPUS.

What may this be, Antigone, my child?

ANTIGONE.

Advancing near a woman I behold
On a fleet courſer of Sicilian breed;
A broad Theſſalian bonnet ſhades her face
From the ſun's ſcorching beams. What can I ſay?
May this be ſhe? or is my ſight deceived?
I doubt, then am aſſured, then doubt again:
I doubt no more: 'tis ſhe, 'tis ſhe herſelf:

diſpatched to the king, he was afraid that Theſeus, not knowing who he was, would pay no regard to a blind old man. To remove his apprehenſions the Chorus aſſures him that his name was well known to them all; and as he had advanced far into the Athenian territories (ſuch is the meaning of μακρὰ κίλευθος, for the diſtance between Colonus and Athens was inconſiderable) ſome travellers had probably ſeen him, and carried the report to the city. To account for the ſpeedy appearance of Theſeus, he ſays that he was on the road to Colonus, where he intended a ſacrifice, when he heard that Oedipus was there.

Her

Her eyes look chearful on me, and her ſmile,
As ſhe draws near, aſſures me it is ſhe;
It is my dear Iſmene, and none elſe.

OEDIPUS.

How haſt thou ſaid, my daughter?

ANTIGONE.

That I ſee
Thy daughter, my dear ſiſter: by her voice
Soon thou wilt learn that hither ſhe is come.

ISMENE, OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ISMENE.

My father, and my ſiſter, with what joy
Do I once more addreſs you! I with pain
Have found you, and with pain I look on you.

OEDIPUS.

Comeſt thou, my child!

ISMENE.

To ſee a mournful ſight.

OEDIPUS.

From the ſame blood deſcended—

ISMENE.

Hapleſs birth!

OEDIPUS.

My daughter, art thou here?

ISMENE.

Not without toil.

OEDIPUS.

My child, embrace me.

ISMENE.

I embrace you both.

OEDIPUS.

Her too with me?

ISMENE.

My ſelf th' unhappy third.

OEDIPUS.

Why art thou here, my child?

ISMENE.

Through care of thee.

OEDIPUS.

Through fondneſs?

ISMENE.

And with weighty tidings fraught,
Thus with one faithful ſervant I am come.

OEDIPUS.

Where are thy brothers, youths now ſtrong for toil?

ISMENE.

Where their fate leads: with them diſorder reigns.

OEDIPUS.

How to Ægyptian manners have they form'd
Their nature and their life? For there the men
Sit in the houſe and weave the web; meanwhile
Abroad the active females always toil,

What life requires providing. Thus of you,
My children, thoſe, who ſhould theſe toils ſuſtain,
Keep themſelves cloſe, like virgins, in the houſe.
You, in their ſtead, for my unhappy ills
Expoſe yourſelves to hardſhips. She, e'er ſince
She paſs'd her tender ſtate of youth, and felt
Her ſtrength grown firm, poor ſufferer, on my ſteps
Attendant, leads my age; and wandering oft
Foodleſs and barefoot through the ſylvan wilds,
Patient of frequent ſhow'rs and the fierce beams
Of the hot ſun, regards not the rich ſtore
That fills the table in the ſheltering houſe,
So that her father be ſupplied with food.
And thou, my daughter oft haſt ventured forth,
The Thebans' watch eluding, to inform
Thy father of the various oracles
On him announced; and when they drove me thence,
An outcaſt from my country, thou daredſt ſtand
My faithful guard. Now therefore what the cauſe
That thou art come? What tidings doſt thou bear,
Iſmene, to thy father? Not for nought
Comeſt thou from Thebes, of this I am aſſured,
Nor without bringing terror to my ſoul.

ISMENE.

What late I ſuffer'd, while I ſought the place
Of thy abode, my father, I forbear
To ſpeak, unwilling to renew the ſenſe
Of hardſhips by recounting them. But now

I come

I come t' inform thee of the preſent ills
Sprung up betwixt thy two unhappy ſons.
Their firſt debate was whether they ſhould yield
The royal ſeat to Creon, nor pollute
The city, reaſoning on the antient ſtain
Which mark'd their race, and thy ill-fated houſe.
Now from ſome god, and their flagitious mind,
A conteſt rages, threatening greater ills,
To ſeize the ſceptre and the regal pow'r.
The younger fiercely of the throne deprives
The elder, Polynices, and by force
Hath driv'n him from his country: he (for thus
Among us wide the ſwelling rumour flies)
An exile to the vales of Argos ſpeeds;
There new alliance forms, and arms his friends
Confederate in his cauſe; that Argos ſoon
His cauſe avenging, would ſubdue the realms
Of Thebes, and raiſe his glory to the ſkies.
Theſe are not tales, my father, idly ſpread;
No; they are dreadful facts. But when the gods
Will pity thy diſtreſs, I cannot learn.

OEDIPUS.

Haſt thou an hope, my child, that yet the gods
Deign to regard me, and will ſave me yet?

ISMENE.

I have from recent oracles this hope,
My father.

OEDIPUS.

What are they? What is by them
Announced, my child?

ISMENE.

The time will come, when thee
Living and dead the Thebans ſhall require
For their protection.

OEDIPUS.

From a wretch like me
What ſuccour can they hope?

ISMENE.

It is declared
Their pow'r depends on thee.

OEDIPUS.

Am I a man
E'en when I am no more?

ISMENE.

The gods, whoſe pow'r
Once ſunk thee, raiſe thee now.

OEDIPUS.

How vain to raiſe
In his old age the wretch that fell when young!

ISMENE.

Yet be aſſured that Creon for this cauſe
Will come to thee: expect him here with ſpeed.

OEDIPUS.

What his intent explain to me, my child.

ISMENE.

ISMENE.

Thee near the Theban land, but not allow'd
To paſs its borders, in their pow'r to hold.

OEDIPUS.

What ſuccour from me, laid before their gates,
Expect they?

ISMENE.

Fatal to them, if thy tomb
Be elſewhere raiſed.

OEDIPUS.

Whoſe wiſdom could attain,
Without the god, this knowlege?

ISMENE.

For this cauſe
Thee near their realms, but of thy ſelf not lord,
It is their wiſh to place.

OEDIPUS.

In Theban duſt
Will they entomb me?

ISMENE.

That thy father's blood
Allows not.

OEDIPUS.

Me then never may they hold
Beneath their pow'r!

ISMENE.

But to the ſons of Thebes
This would be fatal.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

What the potent cauſe

Of ſuch a fate?

ISMENE.

Thy anger, at thy tomb

When they ſhall ſtand.

OEDIPUS.

By whom art thou inform'd

Of what thou ſay'ſt, my child?

ISMENE.

By men who brought

Reſponſes from the Delphic ſhrine.

OEDIPUS.

Of me

This did the god declare?

ISMENE.

So they, to Thebes

Returning, made report.

OEDIPUS.

Which of my ſons

Heard this?

ISMENE.

Both heard it, and both know it well.

OEDIPUS.

Could they hear this, vile wretches, and contemn

Their father, whilſt they graſp at regal pow'r?

ISMENE.

I grieve to hear, yet I muſt bear theſe things.

OEDIPUS.

The flames of this contention may the gods
Never extinguiſh; but to me be giv'n
The iſſue of this fated war, which now
They wage, with mutual fury lifting each
The hoſtile ſpear againſt the other's breaſt:
So ſhould not he, the ſceptre and the crown
Who now poſſeſſes, hold them long; nor he,
Who flying left his country, e'er return;
For they their father, with diſgrace thruſt forth,
Suſtain'd not, nor protected; but by them
In this ill plight driv'n out I was proclaim'd
An exile. Thou wilt ſay, at my requeſt
This, as a grace, the ſtate then granted. No:
It was not ſo: for at the time when grief
Enflamed my ſoul to madneſs, when to die
Had been moſt welcome to me, and with ſtones
To have been cruſh'd, then not a man came forth
To gratify my wiſh: but when my grief
Was ſoften'd by the lenient hand of time,
And I diſcern'd that my now ebbing rage
Had puniſh'd more than my offence deſerved,
Then, after this long interval, the ſtate
Drove me by force an outcaſt from the land;
And theſe my ſons, who then had pow'r to aid
Their father, will'd not to exert that pow'r;

But e'en a little word not deign'd, by them
Compell'd I wander thus, and beg my bread.
But from theſe virgins, far as nature gives
Their ſex the pow'r to aid me, I receive
Food that ſuſtains my life, upon the earth
Reſt without fear, and all the dear ſupports
Children can yield a parent. But my ſons,
Of filial piety regardleſs, graſp
At ſceptres, thrones, and ſovereign rule o'er Thebes.
But me they ſhall not win to league with them;
Nor ſhall th' imperial pow'r on them devolve
What may advantage them; this well I know,
Hearing the oracles ſhe now relates,
And pondering the reſponſes which the god
Of old announced to me. Let them then ſend
Creon to ſeek me here, or in their ſtate
Who elſe is potent, me they ſhall not move.
If you, O ſtrangers, with theſe aweful pow'rs
Reſiding here, with your protection deign
To ſhield me, to your ſtate you will procure
Much ſuccour, and confuſion to my foes.

CHORUS.

Worthy our pity, Oedipus, we deem
Thee and thy daughters: but converſing thus
Since thou haſt urged the ſafety of our ſtate,
Things, which import thy good I would adviſe.

OEDIPUS.

To act as thou ſhalt counſel I am prompt.

CHORUS.

Make an atonement to thoſe pow'rs, to whom
Thou didſt firſt come, and tread this hallow'd ground.

OEDIPUS.

Tell me, ye friendly ſtrangers, with what rites.

CHORUS.

Firſt from the ever-flowing fountain bring
Sacred libations touch'd with holy hands.

OEDIPUS.

And when theſe pure effuſions I ſhall take——

CHORUS.

Goblets, the work of ſkillful hands, are there;
Their higheſt verge and double handles crown.

OEDIPUS.

With verdant branches, or the woof's fine threads?

CHORUS.

Wreathing the ſoft wool of a lamb around.

OEDIPUS.

How next behoves me to diſcharge theſe rites?

CHORUS.

Turn tow'rds the orient morn, and pour the ſtreams.

OEDIPUS.

Theſe from the goblets mention'd muſt I pour?

CHORUS.

At three libations; at the laſt, the whole.

OEDIPUS.

Inſtruct me yet; with what muſt this be fill'd?

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

With water and with honey: add no wine.

OEDIPUS.

This when the earth's dark verdure hath received——

CHORUS.

Thrice on it with both hands place olive boughs
Thrice three; then breathe thy ſupplicating pray'rs.

OEDIPUS.

Theſe I would learn: of higheſt import theſe.

CHORUS.

Propitious as we call them, that with minds
Propitious they their votary would receive
And ſave, implore them thou, or be thy pray'r
Preſented by ſome other: but take heed,
Low be thy voice, and few thy modeſt words;
Then ſlow retire with backward ſtep. Theſe rites
If thou diſcharge, my hope will ſtand ſecure;
If not, O ſtranger, I muſt fear for thee.

OEDIPUS.

Hear you, my daughters, what with friendly voice
Thoſe, who have here their habitance, adviſe?

ISMENE.

We heard them: what muſt now be done, command.

OEDIPUS.

Me to diſcharge theſe things my want of ſtrength,

L. 482. Wine was not permitted in the libations to the Furies: under this idea Oedipus before addreſſed them as "from wine abhorrent." L. 114. See Æſchyl. Eumenid. v. 107.

And

And want of ſight, two bitter ills, deny.
Go one of you, perform theſe rites; for one
In execution of ſuch charge I deem
Sufficient as a thouſand, if the mind
Be well affected; with the utmoſt ſpeed
Perform it then; but leave me not alone;
For, if forſaken, theſe enfeebled limbs
Cannot creep onwards; they require a guide.

ISMENE.

I go then: to diſcharge this truſt be mine.
But ſhow me firſt the place which I muſt find.

CHORUS.

On that ſide of the grove. Shou'dſt thou of aught
Have need, O Virgin ſtranger, there reſides
One thy enquiries ready to reſolve.

ISMENE.

For this I go; Antigone, do thou
Guard here our father: for a parent's ſake
E'en if we toil, we think not of the toil.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Though it be painful to awake a grief
Long calm'd to reſt, yet, Stranger, I would aſk——

OEDIPUS.

What wou'dſt thou aſk?

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Whence all this ſignal grief,
This dreadful, this interminable woe.

OEDIPUS.

This, by each hoſpitable right I beg,
Forbear to open: they are deeds abhorr'd.

CHORUS.

Wide the report hath ſpread, nor yet hath ceaſed;
The truth I wiſh to know.

OEDIPUS.

Unhappy me!

CHORUS.

Let me prevail; comply with my requeſt,
I beg thee; with thy wiſhes I comply.

OEDIPUS.

The worſt of ills I have ſuſtain'd, ſuſtain'd
Unwillingly, O ſtrangers: none of theſe,
Be the gods witneſs, ſprung from my free choice.

CHORUS.

What may this be?

OEDIPUS.

In marriage foul, accurſed,
Me the ſtate bound, unconſcious of the guilt.

CHORUS.

Didſt thou, I tremble as I ſpeak it, fill,
As fame reports, thy mother's bed?

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

To hear
Theſe things is death, O ſtrangers; but from me
Sprung theſe two virgins, of my guilt two proofs.

CHORUS.

Immortal Jove!

OEDIPUS.

And from one mother ſprung
With me.

CHORUS.

Are theſe then daughters, daughters theſe,
And ſiſters of their father?

OEDIPUS.

Wretched me!

CHORUS.

Wretched indeed: for infinite thy ills.

OEDIPUS.

Ah! never can their memory be effaced.

CHORUS.

And thou haſt done——

OEDIPUS.

Theſe are no deeds of mine.

CHORUS.

How not thy deeds?

OEDIPUS.

I from the liberal ſtate
Received

Received a gift, (Oh that I never had!)
And thence ſprung all the woes that rend my heart.

CHORUS.

Unhappy man! And art thou ſtain'd with blood?

OEDIPUS.

Why this? what wou'dſt thou?

CHORUS.

With a father's blood?

OEDIPUS.

Oh! thou haſt pierced me with another grief.

CHORUS.

Didſt thou not ſlay—

OEDIPUS.

I did: yet I have what
To urge in my excuſe.

CHORUS.

What canſt thou plead?

OEDIPUS.

That I will tell thee: ignorant whoſe blood
My hand then ſhed, I by the law am pure;
For I was led unknowing to the deed.

CHORUS.

But ſee, excited by the fame of thee
Our king, the ſon of Ægeus, Theſeus comes.

THESEUS, OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

THESEUS.

Hearing reported oft in days long paſt

The bloody deed that quench'd thy orbs of ſight,
I know thee, ſon of Laius; much more now,
By information on the way received,
I know thee well; thoſe ſqualid weeds, that head
So mark'd with miſery ſhow me who thou art.
Unhappy Oedipus, I pity thee,
And wiſh to aſk with what requeſt to me
And to my people hither thou art come,
Thou, and that hapleſs virgin on thy ſteps
Attending: make it known: be it a taſk
Of toil or danger, fear not a repulſe;
For I have learn'd, I have been train'd to feel,
Like thee, a ſtranger's woes; with many toils
And many dangers in a foreign land
Have I conflicted; from no ſtranger then,
As thou art now diſdainful will I turn,
Not yielding thee protection; for I know,
Being a man, not more than thine my pow'r
To rule th' events to-morrow may bring forth.

OEDIPUS.

Thy generous ſpirit, Theſeus, in few words
Shines forth; behoves me then a brief reply:
For who I am, and of what father born,
And from what country come, thou haſt declared.
Nothing for me remains then, but to ſhow
What at thy friendly hands I would requeſt.

THESEUS.

Of this inform me then; I wiſh to know.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

I come this wretched body to beſtow
On thee; a gift not to the ſight indeed
Alluring, but th' advantages it brings
Are of more value than a beauteous form.

THESEUS.

And what advantage doſt thou deign to bring?

OEDIPUS.

Time, not the preſent hour will ſhow thee this.

THESEUS.

When ſhall in deed thy offer'd good appear?

OEDIPUS.

When I am dead, and thou ſhalt bury me.

THESEUS.

Theſe are the laſt ſad offices of life
Thou now haſt aſk'd; but all between haſt left
Forgotten, or of no importance deem'd.

OEDIPUS.

In copious meaſure theſe are here on me
Conferr'd.

THESEUS.

Small grace doſt thou of me require.

OEDIPUS.

Yet ſee; not ſmall this conteſt.

THESEUS.

Of thy ſons
Is this declared, or me?

OEDIPUS.

They would by force
Compell me to return.

THESEUS.

If ſuch their wiſh,
Thy voluntary wanderings on thy ſelf
Bring much diſhonour.

OEDIPUS.

But when ſuch my wiſh,
They would not yield aſſent.

THESEUS.

Raſh man, in ills
Anger brings no advantage.

OEDIPUS.

Hear me firſt,
Ere thou reprove me.

THESEUS.

Speak; for till inform'd
Ill it becomes me of the cauſe to judge.

OEDIPUS.

O Theſeus, I have ſuffer'd dreadful ills
Added to ills.

THESEUS.

Is it thy ſcope to ſpeak
Of the old ills which plunged thy houſe in woe?

OEDIPUS.

No: for of that each Grecian ſpeaks aloud.

THESEUS.

THESEUS.

More than man's common lot are then thy woes?

OEDIPUS.

They are: for from my country I am driv'n
By mine own ſons, and never to return,
Since in my father's blood my hands are ſtain'd.

THESEUS.

Why then would they recall thee, ſince thy doom
Is to live diſtant?

OEDIPUS.

By the voice divine
Conſtrain'd

THESEUS.

What terrors doth that voice denounce?

OEDIPUS.

Defeat and ſlaughter from this land.

THESEUS.

And whence
'Twixt them and me ſhould ſtrife and war ariſe?

OEDIPUS.

O friendly ſon of Ægeus, to the gods
Alone is giv'n exemption from old age
And death; all elſe th' all-powerful hand of time
Crumbles to duſt. The vigour of the earth,
The vigour of the body waſtes away;
Faith withers to the root, and Perfidy
Puts forth freſh branches. So in men, in ſtates
Leagued now in friendſhip, the ſame ſpirit long

Never

Never remains; but what is grateful now,
Inſtant to ſome, to ſome in diſtant time,
Becomes deteſted, then delights again.
So now though all is amity and peace
'Twixt thee and Thebes, yet ever-changing time
Will, in its progreſs, ever-changing nights
And days beget, in which your plighted hands,
Arm'd for a trivial cauſe, ſhall burſt your leagues;
That my cold corſe, at reſt beneath the earth,
Shall drink their warm blood, if Jove reigns ſupreme,
And Phœbus, ſon of Jove, declares the truth.
But to unfold what ſilence ought to veil
Delights me not; permit me to proceed
In what I firſt began; keep but thy faith,
And never ſhalt thou ſay that Oedipus
Thou didſt receive an uſeleſs habitant
(Unleſs the gods beguile me) to this land.

CHORUS.

Theſe and like things this man before, O king,
Declared he for this country would atchieve.

THESEUS.

The warm benevolence of ſuch a man
Who would reject? To him among us firſt
The common hoſpitable altar ſtands;
Then coming ſuppliant to theſe aweful pow'rs,
To me and to my country he repays
An ample recompence; revering which
His courteſy I never will reject,

But give him in this land to dwell ſecure.
If here the ſtranger wiſhes to abide,
I give thee charge to guard him: if thy will
Inclines thee, Oedipus, with me to go,
Thou haſt thy choice; my will aſſents to thine.

OEDIPUS.

Thou ruler of the ſkies, on men like theſe
Pour down thy bleſſings!

THESEUS.

What doſt thou reſolve?
Wilt thou with me to Athens?

OEDIPUS.

Would the fates
Allow it: but my place is here.

THESEUS.

And here
What wilt thou do? I ſhall not check thy will.

OEDIPUS.

Here will I vanquiſh thoſe, who drove me forth
An outcaſt.

THESEUS.

Great requital haſt thou named
For thy reception here.

OEDIPUS.

If firm thy faith,
And to thy promiſe juſt.

THESEUS.

THESEUS.

Confide in me;
I never will betray thee.

OEDIPUS.

With an oath
Thee, like one baſe of ſoul, I will not bind.

THESEUS.

My word is pledged: there is no ſurer tie.

OEDIPUS.

How wilt thou act—

THESEUS.

What chiefly doſt thou fear?

OEDIPUS.

The men will come.

THESEUS.

Theſe will ſuſtain that care.

OEDIPUS.

Take heed leſt if thou leave me—

THESEUS.

Teach not me
To act as beſt behoves me.

OEDIPUS.

One, who fears—

THESEUS.

My heart ne'er knew to fear.

OEDIPUS.

Know'ſt thou their threats?

THESEUS.

THESEUS.

I know that no man to my will oppoſed
Shall force thee hence. I know that many threats,
Many vain words in rage are vaunted loud;
But when cool reaſon reaſſumes the ſway,
Theſe menaces ſink forceleſs. So, though now
Perchance theſe threaten high, they ſoon ſhall find
Th' attempt to drag thee hence is but to dare
A wide rough ſea, on which their bark will ſink.
Nay, I exhort thee, e'en without my care
Be confident, if Phœbus be thy guide.
Though I may hence be diſtant, yet I know
My name ſhall guard thee from th' aſſault of ill.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Well, ſtranger, to theſe rural ſeats
Thou comeſt, this region's bleſt retreats,
Where white Colonus lifts his head,
And glories in the bounding ſteed.
Where ſadly ſweet the frequent nightingale
Empaſſion'd pours her evening ſong,
And charms with varied notes each verdant vale,
The ivy's dark-green boughs among;
Or ſhelter'd 'midſt the cluſter'd vine,
Which high above, to form a bow'r
Safe from the ſun or ſtormy ſhow'r,
Loves its thick branches to entwine;

Where frolic Bacchus always roves,
And viſits with his foſtering Nymphs the groves.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Bath'd in the dew of heav'n each morn
Freſh is the fair Narciſſus born,
Of theſe great pow'rs the crown of old:
The Crocus glitters robed in gold.
Here reſtleſs fountains ever murmuring glide,
And as their criſped ſtreamlets ſtray
To feed, Cephiſus, thy unfailing tide,
Freſh verdure marks their winding way;
And as their pure ſtreams roll along
O'er the rich boſom of the ground,
Quick ſpring the plants, the flow'rs around.
Here oft to raiſe the tuneful ſong
The virgin band of Muſes deigns;
And car-borne Venus guides her golden reins.

STROPHE 2.

What nor rich Aſia's wide domain,
Nor all that ſea-encircled land
From Doric Pelops named, contain,
Here, unrequired the cult'ring hand,
The hallow'd plant ſpontaneous grows,
Striking cold terror through our foes.
Here blooms, this favour'd region round,
The fertile Olive's hoary head;
The young, the old behold it ſpread,
Nor dare with impious hand to wound:

For

For Morian Jove with guardian care
Delights to ſee it flouriſh fair;
And Pallas, fav'ring, from the ſkies
Rolls the blue luſtre of her eyes.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

My voice yet once more let me raiſe,
Yet other glories to relate:
A potent god for theſe we praiſe,
His preſents to this favour'd ſtate;
The Steed obedient to the rein,
And ſafe to plough the ſubject main.
Our higheſt vaunt is this, thy grace,
Saturnian Neptune, we behold
The ruling Curb emboſs'd with gold
Controul the Courſer's managed pace.
Though loud, O king, thy billows roar,
Our ſtrong hands graſp the well-form'd oar;
And, while the Nereids round it play,
Light cuts our bounding bark its way.

L. 721. The ſacred Olives in the Academia were called Moriæ; hence Jupiter, who had an altar there as protector of the place, had the name of Morian.

L. 729. That Neptune ſhould teach his favoured Athenians the art of navigation is no wonder; but when the Monarch of the Ocean is repreſented as giving them the Horſe, and inſtructing them in equeſtrian exerciſes, does he not appear ſomewhat out of character? A paſſage in Strabo may account for this dark and miſtaken mythology. He tells us that one Eudoxus a Cyzicene, being ſent by Cleopatra, widow of Euergetes the ſecond, on an expedition up the Nile, found above Æthiopia the broken prow of a veſſel that had been wrecked, on which an Horſe was ſculptured: this he carried back to Egypt, where it was known to be a veſſel of Gades, called from the ſculptured image an Horſe. Γαδειρῶν γὰρ τὰς μὲν ἐμπόρους μεγάλα ςίλλειν πλοῖα· τὰς δὲ πολλὰς μικρὰ, ἃ καλεῖν ἵππους, ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν ταῖς πρῴραις ἐπισήμων. Lib. 2. From theſe inſignia probably came the Ποσειδὼν ἵππιος of the fanciful Grecians.

ANTIGONE.

O happy land, for many glories famed,
Behoves thee now aſſert this ſplendid praiſe.

OEDIPUS.

Is there aught new, my daughter?

ANTIGONE.

Creon nigh
Approaches, not without a numerous train.

OEDIPUS.

Revered old men, on you my ſafety now
Depends; protect me, ſhield me from his wrongs.

CHORUS.

Fear not; thou ſhalt have aid: though I am old,
The nation's ſtrength is not decay'd through age.

CREON, OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CREON.

Illuſtrious habitants of this fair land,
I ſee, your eyes declare it, that ſurprize
Hath on my coming ſeized you, mix'd with fear.
But fear me not; nor let your ſpeech be harſh.
No deed of outrage wiſh I to attempt,
For I am old, and know that to a ſtate,
Potent as any Greece can boaſt, I come.
But I am ſent on this man to prevail,
Thus worn with age, t' attend me to the realms
Of Thebes: this charge received I not from one,
But all the citizens; ſince moſt to me,

Through

Through near affinity of blood, belongs
To mourn and pity his calamities.
Then hear me, thou afflicted Oedipus,
Return with me; for all the ſons of Thebes
Recall thee, with juſt cauſe, I more than all,
As more than others (elſe of all mankind
I were the vileſt) for thy ſufferings griev'd,
Beholding thee thus old oppreſs'd with woes,
Ever 'mongſt ſtrangers wandering, deſtitute
Of food, thy ſteps by one attendant led:
Her, hapleſs virgin, never had I thought
To ſee thus fall'n, ſunk to this wretched ſtate,
To thee for ever miniſtring, for thee
Begging the ſcanty meal, and at this age
Of nuptial rites bereft, and ſtill expoſed
To ruffian violence. With baſe reproach
Have I then wrong'd my ſelf, and thee, and all
Our race? Am I that wretch? It is not ſo;
And things well known in vain would we conceal.
Be then adviſed: by thy paternal gods
I now conjure thee, Oedipus, comply
At my perſuaſion, willingly return
To Thebes thy native city, and thy houſe,
Seat of thy fathers; to theſe regions bid
A friendly farewell, they deſerve it of thee:
But juſtice to thy country, ſince thy youth
Was nurtured there, an higher reverence claims.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

O thou, audacious in whate'er is baſe,
And prompt from all juſt words to draw a train
Of deep inſidious ills, why this attempt?
Why ſeek again t' enſnare me, where I moſt
Should grieve to be enſnared? In days long paſt
When with domeſtic miſeries o'erwhelm'd
My ſickening ſoul in exile would have joy'd,
Then to my wiſh this grace didſt thou deny.
But when my ſoul was glutted with its grief,
And in my houſe it had been ſweet to reſt,
For ebbing then I found my former rage,
Then didſt thou drive me forth an outcaſt thence,
Nor was this near affinity of blood
Dear to thee. Now again, when thou didſt ſee
This ſtate benevolent to me, and all
Its race, doſt thou aſſay to drag me hence,
Filing thy tongue to ſmooth thy harſh attempts.
Why this delight to ſhow thy courteſy
When moſt it is unwelcome? If to thee,
What thy wants crave requeſting to obtain,
One ſhould give nothing, nor e'en ſhow a will
To grant thee a ſupply; but, when thy ſoul
Enjoys its wiſh e'en to the full, would give,
When the ſlow favour all its grace hath loſt,
Wou'dſt thou this worthleſs pleaſure wiſh to gain?
Such is to me thy offer'd grace, in words
Pretending good, but hateful in effect.

Nay, I will tell it theſe, that I may ſhow
Thy baſeneſs: hence to draw me thou art come,
Not with leave granted to poſſeſs my houſe,
But to be ſtabled on your confines; thus
Your country ſhould be guarded from the ills
Fear'd from theſe realms. This never ſhall be thine;
But thine ſhall be thoſe ills; for in that land
My vengeful ſpirit always ſhall reſide.
Nor of my kingdom ſhall my ſons ſhare more,
Than to die in it. Seem I not to know
Better than thou the deſtined ſtate of Thebes?
Much better, as by more unerring guides
Inſtructed, Phœbus and his father Jove.
Yet hither haſt thou brought that treacherous front
Harden'd 'gainſt ſhame: but that fine-filed tongue
Shall work thee woe, not ſafety; be aſſured
With me thou never ſhalt prevail: begone,
Let us live here; not ill we here ſhould live
E'en as we are, could we delight in life.

CREON.

Mine doſt thou ween a greater ſhare of grief
From thy refuſal, than what thou muſt feel?

OEDIPUS.

Greatly ſhall I rejoice if neither me,
Nor theſe here preſent thou haſt pow'r to move.

CREON.

Thou wretch, whom time to wiſdom could not train,
But mark'd thee a diſhonour to old age!

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

Pow'rful art thou in ſpeech; but I ne'er knew
A man revering juſtice, who could ſmooth
His tongue to gloze all arguments alike.

CREON.

Much ſpeech, and well adapted, differ wide.

OEDIPUS.

Though brief, yet well adapted are thoſe words.

CREON.

No; not to one that hath a ſoul like thine.

OEDIPUS.

Begone, for I will ſpeak for theſe; nor take
Thy ſtation watching where behoves me dwell.

CREON.

Theſe I atteſt, not thee, and theſe as friends,
What, ſhould I ſeize thee, ſuch replies deſerve.

OEDIPUS.

Me from ſuch guardians who by force ſhall take?

CREON.

From theſe apart thou ſhalt have cauſe of grief.

OEDIPUS.

From what rude deed doth ſuch a menace riſe?

CREON.

Of thy two daughters one I lately ſeized,
And ſent away: this ſoon I hence will lead.

OEDIPUS.

Ah me!

CREON.

CREON.

Thou ſoon ſhalt have more cauſe to ſigh.

OEDIPUS.

Is then my daughter ſeized, and in thy pow'r?

CREON.

Paſs a few moments this too I will ſeize.

OEDIPUS.

O friendly ſtrangers, now on you I call,
What will you do? Will you deſert my cauſe?
Will you not drive this ruffian from your land?

CHORUS.

Stranger, depart: neither thy preſent deeds,
Nor thoſe late done, are juſt: with ſpeed depart.

CREON, *to his attendants.*

Now is your time; ſeize her, and lead her hence,
If wayward ſhe refuſe to go, by force.

ANTIGONE.

Unhappy me, ah, whither ſhall I fly?
Aid from what god, what man ſhall I receive?

CHORUS.

What doſt thou, ſtranger?

CREON.

Him I ſhall not touch:
The virgin's mine.

OEDIPUS.

O rulers of this land!

CHORUS.

Theſe things, O ſtranger, are not juſt.

CREON.

Moſt juſt.

CHORUS.

How are they juſt?

CREON.

I lead away mine own.

ANTIGONE.

O ſtate of Athens!

CHORUS.

Stranger, what means this?
What doſt thou? Wilt thou not forbear? This ſoon
Muſt ſtand the teſt of arms.

CREON.

Take off thy hands.

CHORUS.

Not on this outrage while thy will is bent.
If thou wrong me, thou call'ſt the ſtate to arms.

OEDIPUS.

Did I not ſay this conteſt would be great?

CREON.

This inſtant from the virgin take thy hands.

CHORUS.

Command not thoſe o'er whom thou haſt no pow'r.

CREON.

I ſay to thee, no more the virgin hold.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

I ſay to thee, hence take thy way, begone.
Come forth, my fellow-citizens, come forth,
Our ſtate by force is plunder'd, hither haſte.

ANTIGONE.

O ſtrangers, ſtrangers, I am dragged away.

OEDIPUS.

My child, where art thou?

ANTIGONE.

Borne by force away.

OEDIPUS.

Stretch out thy hands to me.

ANTIGONE.

I have not pow'r.

CREON, *to his attendants.*

Will you not lead her hence?

OEDIPUS.

O wretched me!

CREON.

On theſe two props no more ſhalt thou ſupport
Thy wandering ſteps; but ſince thou wilt o'ercome
Thy country and thy friends, at whoſe command
I, though their ſovereign, do this; have thy will,
O'ercome: yet thou wilt know in time, I ween,
That neither what thou now haſt done avails
To thee for good, nor what thou didſt of old;

The counſils of thy friends thy pride diſdain'd,
And rage indulged hath always work'd thee woes.

CHORUS.

Stranger, thou moveſt not hence.

CREON.

Off; touch me not.

CHORUS.

Of theſe bereaved I will not quit my hold.

CREON.

Thy ſtate with heavier ranſom wilt thou charge;
For not theſe virgins only will I ſeize.

CHORUS.

To what now wilt thou turn thee?

CREON.

I will ſeize
And bear this old man hence.

CHORUS.

A perilous threat.

CREON.

But ſoon to be accompliſh'd, if the king,
The ſovereign of this land, reſtrain me not.

OEDIPUS.

Me, ſhameleſs babler, wilt thou dare to touch?

CREON.

I charge thee be thou ſilent.

OEDIPUS.

Silent! no;

May not theſe aweful pow'rs reſtrain my tongue
From one curſe more, this curſe on thee, vilē man,
Who from my ſightleſs ſteps haſt drawn by force
My tender guide! For this may yon bright god,
Th' all-ſeeing ſun, give thee and all thy race
To cloſe your lives with an old age like mine!

CREON.

Ye natives of this country, ſee you this?

OEDIPUS.

They ſee both me and thee, and they perceive
That wrong'd by deeds in words I ſeek revenge.

CREON.

No longer will I check my rage, but hence
Drag him by force, though here I am alone,
And ſlow through age.

OEDIPUS.

Ah me, unhappy me!

CHORUS.

Preſumptuous ſtranger, hither dareſt thou come
With thoughts to do ſuch deeds?

CREON.

Such are my thoughts.

CHORUS.

This ſtate then I eſteem a ſtate no more.

CREON.

In a juſt cauſe the weak ſubdue the ſtrong.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

Hear you his threats?

CHORUS.

They ſhall not have effect.

CREON.

That Jove may know, not thou.

CHORUS.

What inſult this!

CREON.

An inſult thou muſt bear.

CHORUS.

My countrymen
Come forth, with all your forces come! Ye chiefs
Advance, with ſpeed advance; for now the tide
Of headlong violence o'erflows all bounds.

THESEUS, OEDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

THESEUS.

What means this cry? What outrage raiſed your fears,
That at the altar while the victim bleeds
An offering to the monarch of the ſea,
The god o'er this Colonus who preſides,
You call me? Speak, inform me what the cauſe
That urged me hither with uneaſy ſpeed?

OEDIPUS.

My generous friend, for well I know thy voice,
Dreadful my recent ſufferings from this man.

THESEUS.

What haſt thou ſuffer'd? Who hath wrong'd thee? Speak.

OEDIPUS.

This Creon, whom thou ſeeſt, has forced from me
My daughters, the ſole comfort of my woes.

THESEUS.

How ſay'ſt thou?

OEDIPUS.

My freſh ſufferings thou haſt heard.

THESEUS.

Of my attendants one with ſwifteſt pace
Hence to the altar, bear this charge to all
Th' aſſembled people, from the ſacred rites
Horſemen and troops of foot to wing their ſpeed,
And ſeize the ſtrait where the two roads unite,
Ere there the virgins paſs. I ſhould be held
In ſcorn if, when my faith is pledged, by force
I were defeated. Go as I command,
And uſe thy utmoſt ſpeed. But for this man,
Were I by anger prompted, as his deeds
Deſerve, unwounded by my vengeful hand
I ſhould not ſuffer him go hence. But now,
Since his own laws he brought, to thoſe ſame laws
His treatment ſhall accord; for from this land
Thou never ſhalt depart, till thou haſt brought
The virgins back, and placed them in my ſight.
For thou haſt done what foul diſhonour caſts

On me, on thy high lineage, and thy land:
A country haſt thou enter'd, which reveres
The voice of juſtice, and ne'er dares a deed
That violates the laws; her ſacred rights
Haſt thou o'erleap'd, and ruſhing in by force
Beareſt hence thy ſpoil, deeming perchance my realm
Of force devoid, and ſunk with ſervile fear,
And me ſome ſpiritleſs and abject wretch.
Thebes taught thee not this ruffian deed, nor loves
To cheriſh the unjuſt; nor would her voice
Hail thee with acclamations, if ſhe knew
That thou haſt plunder'd me, and ſeized by force
Unhappy men, the ſuppliants of the gods.
Thy country had I enter'd, were my claims
Moſt juſt, without the ſovereign of the land,
Whoe'er he were, thence nothing had I drawn
Or forced away; well knowing how behoves
A ſtranger in a foreign land to frame
His fair demeanour: but thy deeds diſgrace
Thy country, not deſerving ſuch reproach:
And time in its full courſe hath made thee old,
And void of wiſdom. But I tell thee now,
What I before declared, without delay
Send, let the virgins ſafe be brought again,
Elſe in this land conſtrain'd ſhalt thou abide
Howe'er unwillingly. I tell thee this,
And my heart ſpeaks accordant with my tongue.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Stranger, thou ſeeſt thy ſtate, to what reduced,
Since, though thy noble race beſpoke thee juſt,
Thy deeds have proved thee baſe, and prone to ill.

CREON.

Neither of puiſſant force nor counſil ſage
Deeming thy realm, O ſon of Ægeus, void,
Have I here done this deed; but knowing this,
No friendly zeal e'er moved you to ſuſtain
Thoſe of my blood, by force, againſt my will.
I knew your ſtate would not receive a man
Unholy, with his father's blood diſtain'd;
His nuptial bed polluted with the guilt
Of inceſt. Well I knew your aweful Court
High on the mount of Mars, for wiſdom famed,
Coeval with your land, would ne'er allow
Such outcaſts in their city to reſide.
On this confiding I preſumed to ſeize
The wretch; nor had I done it, but he pour'd
Such dreadful execrations forth on me
And on my race, that for the wrongs received
I deem'd this meet requital; for the force
Of rage is not abated but by death;
The dead feel no reſentment. For theſe things
Act as thy will inclines thee; thus alone,
Juſt though my cauſe, my pow'r is ſmall: yet know
Such as you ſee me now, whate'er your deeds,
Like deeds will I endeavour to repay.

OEDIPUS.

Unbluſhing inſolence! falls this reproach
On my hoar head, or on thine own? while thus
Thy tongue deſcants on murders, nuptial rites,
And miſeries which, unhappy, I ſuſtain'd
Of guilt not conſcious; ſo it pleaſed the gods,
Of old perchance enraged at ſome offence
Of thoſe from whom I ſprung; for fault in me,
To warrant this reproach thou canſt not find
Againſt my ſelf committed, or my houſe.
For tell me, to my father if the voice
Of oracles declared that he ſhould fall
Slain by his ſons, me juſtly for the deed
Doſt thou revile? I had not being then.
If by ill fate (and that ill fate was mine)
I in fierce conflict 'gainſt my father ſtood,
And ſlew him, nothing knowing whom my hand
Oppoſed, canſt thou revile me for a deed
Unknowingly committed? But, thou wretch,
Doſt thou not bluſh that of my mother's bed
Thou haſt conſtrain'd me to make mention, ſince
She was thy ſiſter? I will ſpeak of it
Briefly (for what would ſilence now avail?)
Since thy unhallow'd tongue hath touch'd that point.
She brought me forth, ah me! ſhe brought me forth,
O my unhappy fate! then bore me ſons,
Her foul reproach, unconſcious I of guilt,
Of guilt unconſcious ſhe. But this I know,

Me

Me thou haſt willingly reviled, and her;
Unwillingly I wedded her, and now
Unwillingly ſpeak this. Yet ſhall my name
Fear from theſe nuptials no reviling tongue,
Nor from my father's death, the conſtant theme
Of thy malignant cenſure: for with truth
Anſwer me this, ſhould one with boiſterous force
Inſtant attack thy life, no wrong by thee
Firſt offer'd, wou'dſt thou nice enquiry make
Whether thy father made the rude aſſault;
Or wou'dſt thou in a moment ſtrive t' avenge
The wrong? I think, if that thou loveſt thy life,
Thou wou'dſt avenge thee of the ruffian ſtrait,
Nor with ſlow caution ponder what is right.
On ills like theſe with erring ſteps I ran,
Led by the gods; nor would my father's ſhade,
Could it return to life, I think, reply
Oppoſing my juſt plea. But thou, whoſe ſoul
No juſtice rules, prompted by impious pride
To utter all, though honour bids thy tongue
Be ſilent, in this preſence haſt preſumed
To charge me thus with baſe and ſlanderous blame.
Yet canſt thou ſtoop with adulation bland
To fawn on Theſeus, and th' Athenian ſtate
As train'd to righteous laws; but 'midſt thy praiſe
Of this forgetful, that if ever land
Knew with due honours to revere the gods,
Athens in this hath high præ-eminence.

Yet in this ſtate thy thieviſh hand hath ſeized
Its hoary ſupplicant, and borne away
My virgin daughters. Touch'd with wrongs like theſe
Bending before theſe aweful pow'rs I breathe
My ardent ſupplications, and invoke
Their ſuccour, their protection, that thy pride
May learn what men are guardians of this ſtate.

CHORUS.

This ſtranger hath much merit; and his woes,
In total ruin which have cruſh'd him down,
Deſerve, O king, protection at thy hand.

THESEUS.

Enough of words; for while the ſpoilers haſte
We, who have ſuffer'd wrong, inactive ſtand.

CREON.

What to my feeble age are thy commands?

THESEUS.

Go on the way before, and be my guide,
That in theſe regions if the virgins yet
Are held, thou may'ſt direct me to the place.
If they, who ſeized them, fly, we need not toil;
For others are abroad, whoſe ſwift purſuit
They never ſhall elude to thank the gods
That from this country they by flight eſcaped.
Lead thou the way, and know that thou art ſeized,
As thou haſt ſeized; the hunter fortune takes
In his own toils; for things by fraud obtain'd,
And unjuſt violence, abide not long.
Thy hope of aid ſhall fail thee; for I know

With

With ſuch ſmall force, for ſuch a rude attempt
Unfurniſh'd thus, thy ſpirit had not ſwell'd
To this proud height; there is in whoſe ſupport
Confiding thou haſt dared the deed: but this
Demands attention; not to yield this ſtate
A prey to one invader. Are my words
To thy conception clear; or ſeem they vain,
As when thy thoughts this inſult firſt deviſed?

CREON.

Nothing of what is ſaid I here can blame;
At home what beſt behoves us we ſhall know.

THESEUS.

Go now, hereafter threaten. Thou with us
Remain in quiet, Oedipus, aſſured
I will not reſt, unleſs I firſt ſhould die,
Till to thy wiſh thy daughters I reſtore.

OEDIPUS.

Be thou bleſt, Theſeus, for thy generous mind,
And for thy juſt protection of my age!

OEDIPUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Were I where the dauntleſs train
Swells the battle's brazen roar;
On the hallow'd Pythian plain;
Or the torch-illumined ſhore,

Where

L. 1103. The Chorus, concluding that an engagement muſt enſue, wiſh themſelves with their

Where for men their holy flame
O'er the ſacred Myſteries wakes,
And 'mongſt Prieſts of honour'd name
Where his ſtation Silence takes,
Wont his golden key to bear
In his firm tongue-locking hand!
There the warrior Theſeus, there
Join'd the virgin ſiſters ſtand;
There they ſhall ſoon the conflict ſhare,
And pour the torrent rage of war.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Weſtward haply on the plain,
Where the white and rocky ſteep
Tow'rs o'er Oia's rich domain,
May th' enſanguin'd battle ſweep:
Where impetuous in their ſpeed,
Glowing with the flames of war,
Warriors ſpur the foaming ſteed,
Other warriors roll the car.
Brave the youths who here reſide,
Brave th' Athenian troops in fight;
Shine their reins with martial pride,
All their trappings glitter bright;

their brave countrymen when they ſhould overtake the forces of Creon, whether it were in the plains of Marathon characteriſed by the Temple there dedicated to the Pythian Apollo, or on the ſhores of Eleuſis, or near Leucogeos the domain of the tribe of Oia. Confiding in the valour of their troops they indulge the joyful preſages of victory, and addreſs the gods with prayers for their country, their king, and his attendants. This is in the true ſpirit of a brave and religious people.

L. 1110. This alludes to the religious ſilence obſerved in the Eleuſinian Myſteries. Theſe Prieſts were called Eumolpidæ, from Eumolpus the firſt Hierophant.

These honours in their rich array
To Pallas all and Neptune pay.

STROPHE 2.

Is the dreadful work begun?
Or does ought their force delay?
O let me give the glad presages way!
Soon shall yon bright ætherial sun
Behold him, vaunting now no more,
Compell'd th' afflicted virgin to restore,
Afflicted through her father's woes.
Each day some deed effected shows,
The ruling hand of righteous Jove.
I am the prophet of a prosperous fight.
Had I the pennons of a dove
High o'er the clouds to whirl my flight,
Then should my raptured eyes behold
The victory my thoughts foretold.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Thou in heav'n's high throne ador'd,
Sovereign of the gods above,
Give strength, O pow'rful all-beholding Jove,
Give conquest to my country's lord;
With glory mark his purple way,
And make the ambush'd foe an easy prey!
Pallas, propitious hear my pray'r,
And show that Athens is thy care!

Thee,

Thee, Hunter Phœbus, ſkill'd to trace
The ſylvan ſavage in his rapid flight;
Thee, whom the pleaſures in the chace
Of the fleet, ſpotted hind delight,
Thee I implore, chaſte Huntreſs Maid,
Aid her brave ſons, our country aid!

CHORUS.

Thou ſhalt not, ſtranger, of thy watchman ſpeak
As a falſe augur; for mine eyes behold
The virgins: they return, with haſty ſteps
Advancing nigh.

OEDIPUS.

Where, where? what ſay'ſt thou? how?

THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, OEDIPUS, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

My father, O my father, would ſome god
Give thee to ſee this beſt of men, who thus
Hath brought us back to thee!

OEDIPUS.

My children here!
Are you both here, my children?

ANTIGONE.

By the hands
Of Theſeus, and his brave attendants, ſaved.

OEDIPUS.

Come near, my children; and, what ne'er again
We could e'en hope, ſupport me with your arms.

ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE.

Obtain thy wiſh; we grant it with delight.

OEDIPUS.

Where are you then?

ANTIGONE.

Together we approach.

OEDIPUS.

O my dear bloſſoms!

ANTIGONE.

To a father all

Is dear.

OEDIPUS.

Ye tender props of my old age!

ANTIGONE.

Unhappy props of an unhappy man.

OEDIPUS.

What is moſt dear to me I hold; and now
Were I to die whilſt you thus near me ſtand,
I ſhould not be quite wretched: but ſupport,
On each ſide prop me, growing to the trunk
From which you ſprung; to an afflicted wretch
Outcaſt, and late abandon'd, give ſome reſt.
What hath been done now tell me, but in brief,
A ſhort relation will from you ſuffice.

ANTIGONE.

Theſeus is here, who ſaved us; it is meet
Thou learn from him: ſo ſhall my words be brief.

OEDIPUS.

My daughters thus beyond my hopes reſtored,
Marvel not, generous Theſeus, if my words
Exceed due meaſure. Well I know from thee,
And thee alone, this dear delight, in them
Which I receive, is giv'n me; for thy hand,
And thine alone, preſerved them. May the gods
On thee and on thy ſtate their bleſſings pour
Ample as my warm wiſhes; for 'mongſt you
Only of all mankind have I diſcern'd
A reverence for the gods, a fix'd regard
For juſtice, and a manly love of truth.
The worth, which I have proved, my words extoll,
For what I have, I have from thee alone.
Diſdain not then, O king, to ſtretch thy hand
That I may touch it, and, with leave obtain'd,
Kiſs thee. What have I ſaid? How then can I,
Born wretched, wiſh to touch a man, whom ſtain
Of ill hath ne'er approach'd? It ſhall not be:
Such grace muſt be refuſed. Of all mankind
Thoſe only, who have ſuffer'd ills, can feel
A touch of pity for my ills. I now
Bid thee henceforth farewell; and let thy care,
Thus far extended to a wretch like me,
Through what of life is left me, yet extend.

THESEUS.

I marvel not that many are thy words
Through pleaſure that thy daughters are reſtored;

Nor

Nor that, ere mine, thou joy'dſt in their addreſs.
Theſe things with me are trivial, of no weight,
I have no care aught ſplendid in my life
To ſhow in words, but honourable deeds;
And let theſe ſpeak: I pledged to thee my faith;
In nothing I deceived thee, but have brought
Theſe virgins back alive, and from his threats
Uninjured: how this conteſt was atchieved
Why ſhould I vaunt? In private thou may'ſt learn
From them. But to an incident which late
Occurr'd, as hither I return'd, attend.
Things of ſmall ſemblance oft with import high
Are pregnant: prudence ſlights no circumſtance.

OEDIPUS.

Of this, O ſon of Ægeus, uninform'd
I wiſh a full relation and diſtinct.

THESEUS.

A man, they ſay, no habitant of Thebes,
But to thy blood allied, a ſuppliant ſits
At Neptune's altar, where the victim ſlain
I offer'd when I haſten'd at your cries.

OEDIPUS.

Whence is he? In this hallow'd ſeat why placed?

THESEUS.

I know but this, ſhort conference he requeſts
With thee, in nothing to moleſt thee more.

OEDIPUS.

Why this? No trivial cauſe hath placed him there.

THESEUS.

With thee he wiſhes to converſe, and aſks
Permiſſion thence in ſafety to return.

OEDIPUS.

Who can this be that near the altar ſits?

THESEUS.

At Argos is there none to thee allied,
Who may with ardour wiſh this grace from thee?

OEDIPUS.

My honour'd friend, forbear.

THESEUS.

Why thus diſturb'd?

OEDIPUS.

No more entreat——

THESEUS.

What may I not entreat?

OEDIPUS.

What I have heard ſhows who the ſuppliant is.

THESEUS.

Say who, that his attempt I may rebuke.

OEDIPUS.

It is my hated ſon: of all mankind
Him with moſt pain ſhould I endure to hear.

THESEUS.

Yet thou may'ſt hear, nor yield to his requeſt,
Thy will averſe: to hear can give no pain.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.

His voice, O king, is to a father's ear
Moſt hateful: urge me not perforce to yield.

THESEUS.

But if his ſeat compells to this, take heed,
The ſanction of the god muſt be revered.

ANTIGONE.

Hear me, my father, nor deſpiſe my youth.
Indulge this man, aſſenting to his wiſh
And to the god, in what his ſoul deſires.
Refuſe us not, but let my brother come.
His words, though ill accorded to thy ſtate,
Thee from thy ſtedfaſt purpoſe will not draw
By force: what ill from hearing words can riſe?
The honourable purpoſe of the heart
Is ſignified by words. Nay, weigh this well,
Thou art his father: though his deeds to thee
Be of the vileſt, the moſt impious, right
Wills not that thou repay him like ill deeds;
His own will bring their vengeance. Impious ſons
Have injured other parents, and have raiſed
Anger as fierce; but by th' advice of friends
This harſhneſs hath been charm'd e'en to aſſume
A milder nature. On th' afflicting ills
Thy ſoul has ſuffer'd for thy parents' ſake
Reflect not now; diſmiſs them from thy thoughts,
Adverting only to the dire effects
Of raging anger; thoſe thou ſoon may'ſt know;

For

For violent the proofs of this thou bearest,
Thy orbs of sight extinguish'd. Yield thee then;
Ill it becomes thee that a just request
Repeatedly be urged, or that a grace
Received with grace thou know'st not to repay.

OEDIPUS.

Your painful pleasure thus declared, my child,
You overcome me: be it as you will.
Only if hither he must come, my friend,
Protect me, o'er my life let none have pow'r.

THESEUS.

Of this enough: it is not mine to boast.
Me if the gods protect, be thou assured
Old man, in my protection thou art safe.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Beyond the bounds to strength assign'd
Hast thou a wish t' extend life's lingering day?
With heedful eye my state survey,
And learn that thoughtless folly rules thy mind.
For years thus lengthen'd in their train
Bring nearer weakness, grief, and pain.
But be thy wish indulged beyond its height,
Nought shalt thou see that yields delight;
Insatiate to the tomb no bound it knows,
Though Hymen's torch no longer glows,

No

No choral lyre now charms the ears,
And ſlow-approaching Death to cloſe the ſcene appears.

ANTISTROPHE.

Not to be born is heav'n's firſt grace:
If born, extinguiſh'd ſoon the vital flame,
Back to return whence late he came,
Is heav'n's next bleſſing to man's wretched race.
Youth comes, and with him leads a train
Of idle follies, pleaſures vain:
Thence rugged Toil attends his mazy way,
And Miſery marks him for her prey.
Sedition, Envy, Murder, Paſſion, Strife
Spread horror o'er his path of life;
Theſe to the hated manſions lead
Where chearleſs, friendleſs Age reclines his drooping head.

EPODE.

Not mine alone theſe ills to know,
But on ſome bleak and rocky ſhore
As ſtorms and daſhing billows roar,
So on his hapleſs, hoary brow
Waves heap'd on waves without controll
The tempeſts of affliction roll:
Some from thoſe tracts impetuous ſweep,
Where the ſun ſkirts the weſtern deep;
Some, where he gilds the orient day;
Some, where he beams his noontide ray;
Some, where Arcturus in his height
Flames o'er the boſom of the night.

ANTIGONE.

Hither the ſtranger takes his way; alone
He comes, my father; guſhing from his eyes
Faſt flow the tears.

OEDIPUS.

Who is he?

ANTIGONE.

Whom before
We deem'd him, Polynices: he is here.

POLYNICES, OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

POLYNICES.

Alas, my ſiſters, 'midſt theſe various ills
My own misfortunes ſhall I firſt bewail,
Or thoſe which on my father's hoary head
I ſee have fall'n, whom, in a foreign land,
Exiled, by you attended I have found?
But how attired! his mean and ſqualid garb,
Worn bare by length of time, his aged limbs
Contaminates; and on his eyeleſs head
His matted locks by each rude gale are waved;
And to his garb akin his wretched food
But ill ſupports him. Late, too late I know
The ruin I have cauſed. I call the gods
To witneſs, vile, flagitious as I am,
I come with wholeſome food to cheriſh thee,
And lighten thy accumulated woes.
E'en by the ſide of Jove and on his throne

Sits

Sits Moderation tempering every act:
Nigh thee, my father, let her ſtand. Offence,
Though not to be extinguiſh'd, may be heal'd.
Why art thou ſilent? O my father ſpeak,
Speak ſomething to me; turn not from me thus.
Wilt thou not anſwer me, not e'en a word,
But ſend me thus with mute contempt away,
Nor why thine anger burns declare? But you,
Ye daughters of this man, my ſiſters, ſpeak,
Plead with my father for me, try to move
His unrelenting heart; nor let him ſend
The ſuppliant of the god diſhonour'd hence,
A word to me diſdaining to reply.

ANTIGONE.

Speak, my unhappy brother, ſpeak thy ſelf
What ſad occaſion brought thee hither. Oft
Words as they flow delighting, or perchance
Offending, or to pity ſoothing mild,
Have giv'n a voice e'en to a ſpeechleſs tongue.

POLYNICES.

Then I will ſpeak, for well haſt thou adviſed,
Imploring firſt this god, that he would deign
To be my guardian, at whoſe altar placed
The ſovereign of this country raiſing me
Gave me to come, to hold free converſe here,
And back in ſafety to return. And this
Of you, O ſtrangers, of my ſiſters this,
This of my father wiſh I to obtain.

To thee, my father, I would now unfold
Why I am here. From my paternal realms
I am driv'n forth an exile, on thy throne
Becauſe I aim'd in regal ſtate to ſit,
My birth-right; but Eteocles, to years
By nature leſs indebted, thruſt me out,
Not in juſt right triumphant, nor his claim
Brought to the proof of arms, or noble deeds,
But winning with inſidious arts the ſtate.
Of this I know, and from the Seers have heard,
That the chief cauſe was thy infuriate curſe.
In Doric Argos I ſought refuge; there
The daughter of Adraſtus made my bride,
Aſſociates in my cauſe I raiſed the Chiefs,
Lords of the Apian land, and honour'd high
For martial deeds; that I 'gainſt Thebes might lead
Seven bands commanded by ſeven valiant Chiefs,
And bravely die, or from my country chaſe
Thoſe who have wrong'd me. But of this enough.
What ſanction, hither coming, claim I then?
To thee, my father, ſupplicating pray'rs
For me, and my compeers in arms, I bring,
Who with ſeven bands beneath ſeven ſpears arranged,
Are now encamp'd o'er all the plain of Thebes.
In martial proweſs firſt, and firſt in ſkill
To mark the flight of birds, Amphiaraus;
Ætolian Tydeus marches next, the ſon
Of Oeneus; and next him of Argive race

Eteoclus; there tow'rs Hippomedon
Sent by his father Talæus; in arms
Advances Capaneus with menace high
Inſtant to rend the rampires to the ground.
Parthenopæus, an Arcadian, fierce
Advances, from his mother's virgin ſtate
His name deriving, the undoubted ſon
Of Atalanta. I theſe chiefs among,
Thy ſon, or if not thine, at leaſt the ſon
Of unpropitious Fortune, yet call'd thine,
Lead againſt Thebes th' intrepid Argive troops.
By theſe thy daughters, by thy life, we all
Suppliant entreat thee, O my father, yield,
Remit thy anger, raging 'gainſt this wretch
Now rouſed in arms t' avenge the wrongs ſuſtain'd
From a baſe brother, who hath driv'n me out,
And robb'd me of my kingdom. But the fates,
If there be faith in oracles, declare
That where thou art, there Victory attends.
Now by our country's fountains, by her gods,
Let, I implore thee, my entreaties touch
Thy heart; be thou appeaſed; for I, like thee,
Am poor, and wander in a foreign land;
One fate to us aſſign'd, to thee and me,
Submiſſive to another's will we live.
He lives in royal ſtate, unhappy me!
And 'midſt luxurious pleaſures laughs alike
At thee and me. But if thy fav'ring mind

Accord with mine, him with no mighty toil,
No arduous effort, will I put to flight,
And lead thee back, replace thee in thy houſe,
Replace my ſelf, and drive him out by force.
This boaſt, if thou aſſent, I will atchieve;
But without thee my efforts have no pow'r.

CHORUS.

In reverence to the king make ſome reply,
Such as thou judgeſt meet, then let him go.

OEDIPUS.

But that the ſovereign of this land, my friends,
Had ſent him to me, and eſteems it juſt
That I ſhould anſwer him, he had not heard
My voice: that grace now deign'd, let him begone;
Nor will he find a joy in what he hears.
For thou, vile wretch, the ſceptre and the throne
Holding, which now thy brother holds at Thebes,
Didſt drive thy father out, by thee conſtrain'd
An exile from my country far to rove,
And wear theſe loathſome weeds; the ſight of which
Draws tears from thee, by fortune now reduced
To ſuffer want and wretchedneſs like mine.
Theſe things I muſt not weep, but I muſt bear;
And always keep alive, whilſt I ſhall live,
The memory of thy impious deed; for thou
Haſt made me long familiar with theſe toils,
Thou haſt to exile driv'n me, and by thee
I wander thus, from ſtrangers day by day

Begging

Begging a poor ſubſiſtence. Were not theſe
My daughters, had they not with tender care
Supported me, long ſince (to thee no thanks)
My life had been no more: but theſe preſerve,
Theſe cheriſh me, in bearing toils with me
Theſe take, beyond their ſex, a manly part.
But you, my ſons—Away, you are not mine.
For this cauſe fortune looks upon thee now
Not as ſhe ſoon will look, when thou ſhalt lead
Theſe troops to Thebes: it is not in thy fate
To rend her rampires down, but there to fall
Welt'ring in blood; ſuch too thy brother's fate.
Theſe curſes on you I before denounced,
And now as my aſſociates call them down,
That to a parent you may learn to ſhow
Due reverence, nor diſdain a father more
Though blind. My daughters have not been thus baſe;
Therefore thy ſeat, thy throne ſhall they poſſeſs;
Since Juſtice long renown'd, by laws of old
Eſtabliſh'd, ſhares th' imperial throne of Jove.
But get thee hence, thou haſt no father here,
Deteſted wretch, thou vileſt of the vile,
And take theſe curſes with thee, on thy head
Which I call down: by arms thy native land
Never may'ſt thou recover, nor again
Viſit the vales of Argos; may'ſt thou die
Slain by thy brother's hand, and may thy hand
Slay him, by whom thou art to exile driv'n.

Theſe curſes I call on thee, and invoke
The parent gloom of Erebus abhor'd
To give thee in his dark Tartarean realms
A manſion: I invoke theſe awful pow'rs,
And the ſtern god of war, who 'twixt you raiſed
This horrid hate. Thou haſt my anſwer; go,
Tell all the Thebans, tell thy faithful friends
Confederate in thy cauſe, that Oedipus
Confers this meed of merit on his ſons.

CHORUS.

No gratulation, youth, on thy ſucceſs
Have I to give thee: now with ſpeed return.

POLYNICES.

Much for my journey hither I lament,
Much for my ill ſucceſs; but for my friends
I feel a deeper anguiſh. Wretched me!
Is this then the event that waits our march
In arms from Argos, never to return!
This to no friend, not one, ſhall I make known,
That muſt not be, but ſilent meet my fate.
But, O my ſiſters, ſince the dreadful curſe
Of my relentleſs father you have heard,
Do not, ſhould all its cruel menace find
Like terrible effect, and ſhould you e'er
Return to Thebes, ah! do not, by the gods,
Leave me unhonour'd, but with funeral rites
Lay my dead body in the tomb. The praiſe,
Which for a father your unwearied toils

Have

Have won you now, will equal glory win,
If you perform theſe offices for me.

ANTIGONE.

O Polynices, let my pray'rs prevail!

POLYNICES.

My loved Antigone, what wou'dſt thou? Speak.

ANTIGONE.

Lead back thy troops to Argos, nor deſtroy
With waſting war thy country, and thy ſelf.

POLYNICES.

That cannot be; for if I now ſhow fear,
How ſhall I raiſe ſuch martial force again?

ANTIGONE.

And why again ſhou'dſt thou be fired to rage?
Or in thy country's ruin what thy gain?

POLYNICES.

Oh, what a ſhame is exile, what a ſhame
To bear a younger brother's taunting ſcorn!

ANTIGONE.

Yet haſt thou heard my father's words denounce
Death to you both, each by the other ſlain.

POLYNICES.

Such were his words; but me they muſt not move.

ANTIGONE.

Unhappy me! But who will madly dare
Attend thee, hearing his prophetic voice?

POLYNICES.

POLYNICES.

They ſhall not hear ſuch omens: a brave Chief
Will ſpeak what raiſes courage, not deſpair.

ANTIGONE.

Is this, my brother, thy reſolved intent?

POLYNICES.

It is: detain me not: this warlike march
Shall be my care, though ruin, woe, and death
Await it through my father's ruthleſs curſe.
To you be Jove propitious, if you pay
Theſe rites to me when dead, for ne'er again
Shall I alive your tender care receive.
Nay, hold me not, but take my laſt farewell,
For living never ſhall you ſee me more.

ANTIGONE.

Wretched Antigone!

POLYNICES.

Lament me not.

ANTIGONE.

Who can behold a brother ruſh on death
With open eyes, and not lament his fate?

POLYNICES.

If my fate calls me, I will die.

ANTIGONE.

Thy death
Yet ſhun; yet hear me; let me yet prevail.

POLYNICES.

POLYNICES.

Urge not what honour wills not that I grant.

ANTIGONE.

Of thee bereaved how wretched ſhall I be!

POLYNICES.

Theſe things are in the fates, whether to good
Thy life be doom'd, or ill. May never ill,
I pray the gods, reach you, by all eſteem'd
Unworthy what affliction is to feel.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Theſe are new ills; theſe horrible events,
Late from this eyeleſs ſtranger learnt, are new,
If fate aſſigns no refuge; but my voice
Knows not to ſay that what the gods decree
Fails of its purpoſe. Time beholds theſe things,
Always beholds them; ills of old announced
He ſaw confirm'd, and haſtens in his courſe
To ſee the meaſure of affliction full.——
Almighty Jove, what thunders rend the air!

OEDIPUS.

My daughters, O my daughters, to this place
Is there the generous Theſeus who will bring?

ANTIGONE.

His preſence what of moment here requires!

OEDIPUS.

Soon will this winged thunder of high Jove
Lead me to Pluto's realms. Send then with ſpeed.

CHORUS.

Awefully dreadful is this deep'ning roar
Roll'd by the hand of Jove: my hoary hairs
Are raiſed through horror upright on my head,
And my ſoul ſinks within me.—There again
The rapid lightening flames along the ſky.
What terrible event doth this portend?
The dread of it appalls me: not in vain,
Not unpredictive of ſome dreadful fate
Theſe thunders roll.—Almighty Jove! again
Wide through th' ætherial vault of heav'n they roll.

OEDIPUS.

This, O my daughters, is the fated day
That ends my life: there is no refuge more.

CHORUS.

How know'ſt thou this? Whence haſt thou thus divined?

OEDIPUS.

I know it well: but with the utmoſt ſpeed
Be your illuſtrious ſovereign hither call'd.

CHORUS.

Ah me, ah me! Again the thunder's roar
Around us with redoubled fury rolls.
Be merciful, O god, if to this land,
My native country, aught of dire event
Thou bringeſt, yet be merciful to me;

Nor

Nor let me ſhare misfortune as my meed,
Becauſe this man with fated woes oppreſs'd
I ſaw: Almighty Jove, on thee I call!

OEDIPUS.

Is the king near, my daughters, that alive
He yet may find me, and my ſenſe entire?

CHORUS.

What to his ſecret faith wou'dſt thou confide?

OEDIPUS.

My promiſe, when his kindneſs I received,
No trivial favour, I would now return.

CHORUS.

Hither, my ſon, haſte hither, if perchance
On the ſhore's loweſt verge thy pious hand
Burns offerings on the altar to the god,
That rules the ocean, hallow'd, hither come.
The ſtranger, grateful for thy courteous deeds,
Juſt recompence to thee, thy ſtate, thy friends
Wiſhes to pay: come then, O king, with ſpeed.

THESEUS, OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

THESEUS.

Again theſe cries! What mean they? for diſtinct
I hear your voices, I the ſtranger's hear.
Hath Jove's fierce lightening, or the ſtormy hail
Burſt on your heads? Such terrible events,
Oft happen, when the god his thunder rolls.

OEDIPUS.

Thou to my wish, O king, art come: some god,
To crown thy happy fortune, led thy steps.

THESEUS.

What, son of Laius, hath arisen new?

OEDIPUS.

My life draws tow'rds its end; let me perform,
In nothing false, to thee and to thy state
What I affirm'd; then willingly I die.

THESEUS.

What proof assures thee that thy death is nigh?

OEDIPUS.

The gods, the gods themselves, whose voice is truth,
Proclaim it to me now by signs foretold.

THESEUS.

What signs, old man, have this event declared?

OEDIPUS.

These unremitting thunders, and these flames
Thick flashing, hurl'd by Jove's resistless hand.

THESEUS.

I in thy words have faith; for I have mark'd
In many things thy fate-predicting mind,
In nothing false: say then what must be done.

OEDIPUS.

Now, son of Ægeus, I will show thee things
Glorious to thee and to thy state, which time
Shall never darken. To the fated place

Where

Where I muſt die I now will lead the way,
Not led, nor guided: but to mortal man
Never diſcloſe the ſecret ſpot, nor where
It lies; it ſhall be then thy ſtrong defence
For ever, more than cloſe-compacted ſhields
And ſpears of neighbouring ſtates to thee allied.
But things myſterious, not as yet by words
Unfolded, thou ſhalt learn when thither come
Alone: to none of all thy citizens,
Nor to my daughters to my ſoul though dear,
Would I reveal them: lock them in thy breaſt:
But when thy life approaches to its end,
Declare them only to the Chief that ſtands
In higheſt honour; to his ſucceſſor
Let him diſcloſe them. Thus thy royal ſeat
Shall in this city ſtand impregnable
To all the inroads of the dragon-race.
For oft we ſee that ſtates, though founded well
On righteous laws, are prone t' abuſe their force
To inſolent oppreſſion: but the gods
Exact, though late, obſerve when one diſdains
Their holy mandates, and to madneſs turns.
That, ſon of Ægeus, that be far from thee.
But I inſtruct a mind in all the parts
Of virtue ſkill'd. Now go we to the place
(For the ſtrong impulſe of the god I feel
Urging me on) nor fear leſt we profane
The ſanctity we reverence. Follow me

This way, my daughters; I am now become
A guide to you, as to your father long
You have been guides. Go then, but touch me not;
Let me unguided find the ſacred tomb,
Where theſe old limbs are deſtined to repoſe
Beneath the earth. Go this way, this way go;
For this way Hermes, who conducts the dead,
Leads me, and ſhe o'er the dark realms who reigns.
O light, thy beams though I no more behold,
(Once I beheld them) now theſe aged limbs
Feel thy laſt touch; with feeble ſteps I go
To cloſe my laſt of life in death's dark ſhades.
But be thou bleſt, my noble, honour'd friend,
Thou, and thy country, and thy faithful train:
Yet 'midſt ſucceſs, 'midſt glories always yours,
Think on the dead, remember Oedipus.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

If I may thee, infernal Queen,
Thou gloomy pow'r by mortal eyes unſeen,
With holy awe revere;
And thee, ſtern Monarch, whoſe terrific ſway
The dreary realms of night obey,
Hear Pluto, Pluto hear!
Let not pangs of tort'ring pow'r
Rack the ſtranger's dying hour,
While the chearleſs path he treads
To the Stygian houſe that leads.——

Guiltleſs

Guiltleſs thou waſt doom'd to know
Various ills and bitter woe:
May the god with juſt regard
Grace thee with a bright reward!

ANTISTROPHE.

Ye aweful pow'rs, from realms of night
Who vengeful riſe the guilty to affright!
And thou, grim Dog of Hell,
Before the iron gates of Pluto ſpread
Enormous on thy horrid bed,
With many a hideous yell!
Whilſt thy echoing cave reſounds,
Guarding fierce thoſe diſmal bounds;
Thou, whom Earth to Tartarus bore,
Ceaſe, oh ceaſe thy dreaded roar;
Gentle meet him in thoſe glades,
When he joins the ſilent ſhades;
Ever wakeful, ceaſe t' appall;
Dog of Hell on thee I call!

COLONIATE, CHORUS.

COLONIATE.

Few words, my fellow citizens, may ſpeak
That Oedipus is dead; but not in few
The manner, and each aweful circumſtance
Attending that event, can I relate.

CHORUS.

Is then th' unhappy man no more!

COLONIATE.

COLONIATE.

Know this,

For ever he hath left this mortal life.

CHORUS.

Favour'd by heav'n his death, and void of pain?

COLONIATE.

This yet demands aſtoniſhment. Thou know'ſt,
For thou waſt preſent, how he parted hence,
Led by no friend, but to us all a guide.
When he approach'd the rent rock's craggy verge
With ſteps of braſs deep rooted in the earth,
Where many broken paſſes wind along,
In one of theſe near the gulf's yawning mouth
He ſtood, where Theſeus and Pirithous placed
Th' eternal pledges of their mutual faith:
There in the midſt between Acherdus ſteep
And the Thorician rock on a raiſed ſtone
Himſelf he ſeated, and his ſqualid weeds
Ungirding to his daughters gave command
To bring him lavers and libations pure
Of living water. To the mount, thence ſeen,
Of Ceres cloath'd in lively green they went
Haſting their father's orders to perform,
With lavers cleanſed, and in a decent robe
Array'd him, as funereal rites require.
Theſe pleaſing offices, and all whate'er

L. 1693. Mention was before made of the "brazen way." Theſe ſteps were ſuppoſed to lead down to the infernal realms.

His

His ſoul could wiſh, perform'd, the Stygian Jove
Thunder'd beneath; the virgins, as they heard,
Trembled with horror, at their father's feet
Fell down, and wept, beating their breaſts with loud
And long laments. But he, the dreadful ſound
Soon as he heard, embraced them in his arms,
And ſaid, my daughters, on this fated day
You have no more a father; what was mine
Is all rent from me, and the taſk no more
Is yours my poor ſubſiſtence to provide,
A painful taſk, I know; but one ſhort word
Sweetens all toils; for greater love from none
Than from your father can you e'er receive;
Now you will paſs your lives of him deprived.
Thus mournfully, in cloſe embraces lock'd,
They all lamented: but at length their ſhrieks
Aroſe no more, the cries of grief were huſh'd,
And all was ſilence. Suddenly a voice
Call'd him aloud: awe-ſtruck we ſtood aghaſt:
Again, and oft it call'd him, "Oedipus,
Why, Oedipus, delay we to depart?
Thine this delay." Soon as he heard the god
Thus calling him, the royal Theſeus nigh
He bids approach, and ſaid, my honour'd friend,
Thy hand, the well-proved pledge of former faith,
Give to my daughters; and, my children, give
Your hands to him; and promiſe that thou ne'er
Wilt willingly betray them, but perform

Always benevolent whate'er thy thought
Shall tell thee will to their advantage tend.
The generous king ſuppreſs'd his tears, and gave
His hand, his promiſe with a ſolemn oath
Confirming. This accompliſh'd, Oedipus
His daughters in his feeble arms embraced,
And ſaid, my children, let your generous minds
Not grieve that from this place you muſt depart;
Nor, what your eyes muſt not behold, deſire
To ſee; nor, what muſt not be heard, to hear;
The fates oppoſe your wiſh: go then, the hour
Demands it; but alone let Theſeus ſtay
Witneſs of the event. We heard him ſpeak
Theſe words, and mournful with tear-moiſten'd eyes
Attendant on the virgins left the place.
But in ſhort ſpace we ſtop'd, we backwards turn'd
Our eyes; the man was no where to be found;
He was not; but we ſaw the king alone;
He ſtood, and o'er his face his hands he ſpread
Shading his eyes, as if with terror ſtruck
At ſomething horrible to human ſight.
Thus long he ſtood not, but we ſaw him ſoon
The Earth adoring, and Olympus high,
Seat of th' immortal gods, with ardent pray'r.
But by what fate he died no mortal man,
Save Theſeus, can declare: for not the flames
Thick flaſhing from the thunders of high Jove
Conſumed him, nor the tempeſt from the ſea

Then

Then raging wild; but haply by the gods
Borne thence, or ſinking through the friendly earth,
Which in her deeply-rifted boſom oped
A painleſs paſſage to the realms below.
Here is no cauſe for wailings; for he died
From all the anguiſh of diſeaſe exempt,
A man of all the human race who claims
Our wonder moſt. If any deem my ſenſe
Not perfect, theſe events while I relate,
My ſenſes, let them know, are ſound as theirs.

CHORUS.

Where are the virgins and th' attending train?

COLONIATE.

Not diſtant far; the voice of weeping heard,
And loud laments, gives ſign that they approach.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

Now, wretched as we are, now we muſt wail
Miſeries till now unknown, our father's death,
Which time can ne'er eraſe: for his dear ſake
With patience many a painful toil we bore;
Now, at the laſt, what miſeries muſt we ſee
And ſuffer, miſeries dreadful to the ſenſe!

CHORUS.

What mean'ſt thou?

ANTIGONE.

More than thought can comprehend.

CHORUS.

True, he is gone.

ANTIGONE.

And ſo, as moſt thy ſoul
Could wiſh; for not in war, or ſtormy ſeas
Found he his death; but obſcure unſearch'd tracts,
In ſome dark fate appearing, ſnatch'd him hence.
But on our eyes (unhappy me!) now hangs
The ſickly gloom of night: for by what means,
Wandering o'er what ſtrange land, what billowy ſea,
Shall we the poor ſupports of life procure?

ISMENE.

I know not. Oh that ruthleſs death would take
Me too, unhappy me, that I might die,
Die with my aged father! for in life
What now remains that prompts a wiſh to live?

CHORUS.

Moſt excellent of daughters, what the gods
Aſſign our lot, ſubmiſſive to bear well
Becomes us. Check the ardor of your grief;
Be calm; no cauſe for lamentation here.

ANTIGONE.

I had a fondneſs e'en for ills with him;
Things not delightful, whilſt theſe hands ſuſtain'd
His feeble limbs, afforded me delight.
O my loved father, now beneath the earth

L. 1795. ὡς ἔμοιγ' ὁ μέλλων ζῆος οὐ ζωτός. Cui poteſt eſſe vita vitalis? ut ait Ennius.—Cicero de amicitia.

Cloſed

Closed in eternal darkness, dear to me
Wast thou in age, and shalt be ever dear!

CHORUS.

He hath obtain'd——

ANTIGONE.

He hath indeed obtain'd
What he wish'd warmly: in a foreign land
He died, and lodges in eternal shades
Beneath the ground: nor hath he left a grief
That shall forget to weep; for from my eyes
For thee, my father, shall the tears of woe
For ever stream; for nothing can efface
This sorrow deep imprinted on my heart.
Thou shou'dst not in a foreign land have died;
But thou hast died, and left me desolate.

ISMENE.

Me now, unhappy me, what fate awaits,
Helpless, forsaken as I am, and thee,
My sister, of our father thus bereaved!

CHORUS.

But, ye loved mourners, since his life hath found
An end the best, the happiest, cease your griefs;
For the assaults of misery none escape.

ANTIGONE.

Hence, my loved sister, let us haste again.

ISMENE.

Whither? with what intent?

ANTIGONE.

I have a wiſh,
A ſtrong deſire, wretch that I am, to ſee
Where in his manſion low my father lies.

ISMENE.

How may this be? Reflect, ah wretched me!
He lies without a tomb, deprived of all——

ANTIGONE.

Lead me, then kill me. Where henceforth, ah me!
Shall I deſerted, friendleſs, helpleſs, paſs
My miſerable life?

CHORUS.

My mourning friends,
Be not thus troubled.

ANTIGONE.

Whither ſhall I fly?

CHORUS.

You have already fled, where never ill
Shall reach you.

ANTIGONE.

Grateful I acknowledge this.

CHORUS.

What further thoughts diſturb thy anxious mind?

ANTIGONE.

I know not how to Thebes I ſhall return.

CHORUS.

Think not of that: all is confuſion there.

ANTIGONE.

And was before; one while the ſwelling tide
O'erflows all bounds; one while it ebbs again.

CHORUS.

Fortune hath toſs'd you on a wide wild ſea.

ANTIGONE.

It hath, it hath.

CHORUS.

Thy ſorrows touch my ſoul.

ANTIGONE.

Whither, O Jove, can we direct our ſteps? 1845
Is there an hope to which the god now leads?

THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

THESEUS.

Virgins, reſtrain your ſorrows: to lament
Thoſe in whoſe tombs ſuch bleſſings are repoſed,
Becomes us not: grief here would merit blame.

ANTIGONE.

O ſon of Ægeus, at thy knees we fall. 1850

THESEUS.

Of me, O virgins, what would you requeſt?

ANTIGONE.

We wiſh to viſit our loved father's tomb.

THESEUS.

It may not be; this grace I cannot yield.

ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE.

What, ſovereign lord of Athens, haſt thou ſaid?

THESEUS.

Your father, virgins, gave me ſolemn charge
That none approach the place, that none addreſs
With vows the hallow'd ground in which he lies:
Obeying this, he told me I ſhould hold
Theſe realms from hoſtile inſult always ſafe.
The god my promiſe heard, and the firm oath
Of Jove which all things hears.

ANTIGONE.

If ſuch his charge,
With meek ſubmiſſion to his will we yield.
But ſend us to Ogygian Thebes, if there
Haply the dæmon Rage, athirſt for blood,
Ruſhing between our brothers, we may check.

THESEUS.

This I will grant, and all that I can do
To work your wellfare, and to gratify
Him who, late gone, now lies beneath the earth.
No toil for you my friendly care declines.

L. 1857. By Δαίμων καὶ Διὸς ὅρκος the poet expreſſes the Ζεὺς ὅρκιος ſo religiouſly reverenced by the Grecians. To give this Oath the greater ſanctity it is here repreſented as a god, and inveſted with the attributes of a god; ſo Ennius,

O fides alma, apta pinnis, et jusjurandum Jovis!

L. 1860. Ogygian. See Stanley's note on v. 327 of The ſeven Chiefs againſt Thebes; or the tranſlator's note on v. 979 of the Perſians of Æſchylus.

CHORUS.

Ceaſe then, and raiſe the voice of grief no more; 1870
For all theſe things are ratified by fate.

It has often been ſaid on the authority of Tully, let it be ſaid once more, and in the words of his elegant Tranſlator, that "Sophocles continued in extreme old age to write tragedies. As he ſeemed to neglect his family affairs whilſt he was wholly intent on his dramatic compoſitions; his ſons inſtituted a ſuit againſt him in a court of judicature; ſuggeſting that his underſtanding was impaired, and praying that he might be removed from the management of his eſtate: agreeably to a cuſtom which prevails likewiſe in our own country, where if a father of a family by imprudent conduct is ruining his fortunes, the magiſtrate commonly interpoſes and takes the adminiſtration out of his hands. It is ſaid that when the old bard appeared in court upon this occaſion, he deſired that he might be permitted to read a play which he had lately finiſhed, and which he then held in his hand: it was his Oedipus in Colonis. His requeſt being granted; after he had finiſhed the recital he appealed to the judges, whether they could diſcover in his performance any ſymptoms of an inſane mind? and the reſult was, that the court unanimouſly diſmiſſed the complainants petition." Melmoth's tranſlation of Tully's Eſſay on Old Age.

"Sophocles had almoſt attained his hundredth year when he compoſed this tragedy; in which the marks of decayed genius are ſo far from appearing, that it was deemed by the antients an unrivalled maſter-piece of dramatic poetry." Melmoth from Valerius Maximus.—There are ſome modern criticks who affect to ſpeak of it with contempt. The tranſlator gives it the preference to any of the tragedies of Sophocles;

——— εἰ δὲ μὴ δοκῶ φρονῶν λέγειν,
Οὐκ ἂν παρείμην ὅστις μὴ δοκῶ φρονεῖν.



ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE.

AFTER the defeat of the Argive army, and the death of the contending brothers, Creon, who ſucceeded to the throne of Thebes, allowed funeral honours to Eteocles, but commanded the body of Polynices to be caſt out unburied, a prey to dogs and ravenous birds, denouncing death to any perſon who ſhould preſume to diſobey his edict, and inter the corſe. The tender and virtuous Antigone, ſo illuſtrious for her filial piety, ſhines forth on this occaſion a bright example of affection to her brother and reverence to the gods; animated with a ſenſe of duty, and unterrified by the menaces of a relentleſs tyrant, ſhe pays the laſt ſad offices to the unhappy Polynices. This, with its dreadful conſequences, is the ſubject of this very intereſting tragedy.

Æſchylus gave a ſlight ſketch of this ſubject, which Sophocles has here filled up with a maſterly hand. Euripides, in his tragedy of the Supplicants, has ſhown us that the rites of ſepulture were conſidered as the moſt ſacred of laws: we deſpiſe their ſuperſtition, but we muſt approve their wiſdom in this reſpect, and reverence their humanity; indeed the feelings of our common nature are nearly the ſame in all ages and all countries.

The Chorus is compoſed of ſome of the principal inhabitants of Thebes, ſelected for their known attachment and fidelity to the houſe of Labdacus, and ſummoned by Creon, as they

imagined, to a council; but they ſoon found that he convened them only to give their ſanction to his inhuman and impious edict; they ſeemed diſpoſed indeed to vindicate the action of Antigone by aſcribing it to the impulſe of the gods; but the king rebukes them harſhly, and they become ſubmiſſive even to ſervility; they had a ſenſe of religion and their duty, but "fear had chained their tongues;" nor till Tireſias had alarmed the fears of the tyrant, and they ſaw his ſavage mind begin to relent, did they dare to take a decided part in favour of humanity and religion. Had they ſupported their manly office, and reproved the barbarous inſolence of their new Sovereign with the firm and virtuous ſpirit of Free Men, their conduct would have given elevation and dignity to the drama: but the great poet well knew for whom he wrote; at Athens every thing was political; their paſſions, their prejudices, their pride, and even their diverſions took that caſt. In the Perſian war Thebes had deſerted the cauſe of glory and of Greece, and was beſides hoſtile to the Athenian ſtate; therefore to this generous people animated with reſentment, conſcious of their own merit, and glowing with all the enthuſiaſm of civil liberty, nothing could be more pleaſing than a repreſentation of their hated enemies under the moſt contemptible of all circumſtances, as ſlaves to a tyrant.

The Scene is at Thebes before the gates of the palace.

ANTIGONE.

Perſons of the Drama.

ANTIGONE.
ISMENE.
CREON.
HÆMON.
TIRESIAS.
EURYDICE.
MESSENGERS.
ATTENDANTS.
CHORUS, Theban Senators.

Perſons of the Drama.

ANTIGONE.
ISMENE.
CREON.
HÆMON.
TIRESIAS.
EURYDICE.
MESSENGERS.
ATTENDANTS.
CHORUS, THEBAN SENATORS.

ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE.

ANTIGONE.

MY ſiſter, loved Iſmene, of the ills
Which ſprung from Oedipus conceives thy thought
One by the hand of Jove not brought on us
His ſole-ſurviving children? There is nought
That ſinks the ſoul with anguiſh, deep diſtreſs,
Shame, and diſgrace, but in thy ills and mine
I ſee it all. E'en now what new decree
Is rumour'd by the Chief as late proclaim'd
Through all the city? Know'ſt thou? Haſt thou heard?
Or art thou unacquainted with the ills
Which from our foes advance againſt our friends?

ISMENE.

To me no tidings of our friends are come,
Pleaſing or mournful, ſince the fatal hour

At once deprived us of our brothers, ſlain
Each by the other's hand; and this laſt night
The ſlaughtering ſword hath quell'd the Argive hoſt;
Further than this I know not, nor have heard
Aught of good fortune or affliction more.

ANTIGONE.

I know it well, and call'd thee forth before
The palace gates, that thou may'ſt hear alone.

ISMENE.

What is it? Dark and troubled ſeem thy thoughts.

ANTIGONE.

Know then that of our brothers Creon deigns
One with a tomb to grace, and caſts one forth
Unhonour'd. With all juſt and ſolemn rites
Eteocles, they ſay, beneath the earth
He places, honour'd by the dead below.
But his harſh edict is proclaim'd, that none
Entomb, that none bewail the wretched corſe
Of Polynices, doom'd by him to lie
Unwept, unburied, with his fleſh to gorge
The ravening birds, whoſe keen eye marks their prey.
This the good Creon hath, they ſay, to thee
And me (for I muſt name my ſelf) enjoin'd;
And hither comes his mandate to proclaim
To thoſe who know it not; no trivial charge,
Nor to be ſlighted; for whoe'er performs
Aught of theſe offices, is doom'd to die.

Such

Such is our ſtate; which calls on thee to ſhow
Thy high-born ſpirit, or degenerate mind.

ISMENE.

What, wretched ſiſter, what can I avail,
Oppoſing, or obeying his command?

ANTIGONE.

Wilt thou aſſiſt me? Wilt thou ſhare my toils?
Reſolve.

ISMENE.

What deed of danger to attempt?
What thy intent?

ANTIGONE.

Wilt thou with thine aſſiſt
My hand, and bear this wretched corſe away?

ISMENE.

Wou'dſt thou interr him, though the ſtate forbids?

ANTIGONE.

Mine and thy brother, e'en though thou refuſe
Thy ſocial aid, I never will betray.

ISMENE.

Wilt thou, too daring, Creon's mandate ſcorn?

ANTIGONE.

He has no right to hold me from my friends.

ISMENE.

Yet, O my ſiſter, to remembrance call
Our father's fate; how odious, how defamed

He periſh'd, when confounded with the ſenſe
Of his offences, in his rage he rent
With his own hands his bleeding orbs of ſight.
His mother then and wife, to ills on ills
A double title, in the wreathed nooſe
Died ſelf-deſtroy'd. Our brothers now, both ſlain
Each by the other's ſpear, unhappy youths,
Have in one day one common fate atchieved.
We now remain ſole reliques of our houſe;
Think then how we ſhall periſh by a fate
More wretched ſtill, if we by force infringe
The ſovereign pow'r and edict of our lords.
Conſider too that we are women, weak
By nature, and unable to contend
With men; thus ſubject to a ſtronger pow'r
We muſt hear this, and what may grieve us more.
I then (of thoſe beneath the earth revered
Imploring pardon, ſince by force conſtrain'd)
Will yield obedience to our potent lords.
Attempts beyond our ſtrength no prudence ſhow.

ANTIGONE.

I would not urge thee; nor, were now thy mind
Prompt to the deed, conſent that thou ſhou'dſt act
With me: be ſuch as is thy will to be.
I will interr him; and performing this
Death will be glorious to me; I ſhall lie
With my dear brother, to my brother dear,
Theſe pious rites diſcharged; for to the dead

Longer

Longer a grace is pleaſing than to thoſe
Who live; ſince there for ever I ſhall lie.
Do thou, if ſuch thy pleaſure, lightly deem
Of ſacred things, the honours of the gods.

ISMENE.

I hold them high in honour; but to act
By force againſt the ſtate were raſh and wild.

ANTIGONE.

Make that thy fair pretence; but I will go,
And for my deareſt brother raiſe a tomb.

ISMENE.

Unhappy ſiſter, how I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE.

Fear not for me; be thy own life thy care.

ISMENE.

Yet to none other thy intent diſcloſe;
Conceal it: of my ſilence be aſſured.

ANTIGONE.

No, ſpeak it loud: more hateful wilt thou be
If ſilent; be it then proclaim'd to all.

ISMENE.

Thou haſt a warm heart in a dangerous act.

ANTIGONE.

Pleaſing, I know, this act to thoſe whom moſt
Behoves it me to pleaſe.

ISMENE.

ISMENE.

Couldſt thou effect
Thy purpoſe; but the deed exceeds thy pow'r.

ANTIGONE.

When my pow'r fails, I from th' attempt will ceaſe.

ISMENE.

Attempt not things which cannot be atchieved.

ANTIGONE.

Thou wilt be hated e'en by me, if thus
Thou ſpeak, and juſtly by the dead be held
In hatred. Leave me then, and my deſign
Thus raſh, to put this danger to the proof.
To me no ſufferings have that hideous form
Which can affright me from a glorious death.

ISMENE.

Go then, ſince thus reſolved; but know th' attempt
Shows frenzy, though ſtrong friendſhip to thy friends.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Thou Sun, whoſe orient ray
On rampired Thebes ne'er roſe ſo bright,
At length haſt thou diſplay'd thy light,
Eye of the golden day,
Haſting o'er Dirce's ſacred ſtreams
To roll ſublime thy glorious beams!

The

The Argive firſt, who dared to wield
With hoſtile rage his ſilver ſhield,
(His thick-embattled martial train
Defeated on th' enſanguin'd plain)
Thou madeſt to turn his ſharp-rein'd ſteed,
And urge his flight with headlong ſpeed.
He, in the cauſe of Polynices arm'd,
Our ſons with doubtful war alarm'd;
Soar'd like an Eagle o'er the plains below,
And cover'd with his wings of ſnow
Shrill-ſcreaming hurtled o'er the realm,
With many a glittering lance, and many a creſted helm.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Impatient of delay
High o'er our bulwarks on a mound,
With purple ſpears encircled round,
He ravin'd for his prey.
At our ſeven gates his warlike pow'rs
In deep array aſſail'd our tow'rs;
But his pride ſunk, to flight conſtrain'd
Ere with our blood his beak was ſtain'd;

L. 115. So Euripides diſtinguiſhes the Argive troops,

From our high tow'rs we view the Argive hoſt,
Their white ſhields glittering to the ſun.—Phœniſſ. 1242.

L. 130. There is much confuſion here: the Argive Chief is characteriſed as a ſhrill-ſcreaming Eagle; the Eagle is then repreſented as the Argive Chief. Æſchylus has deſcribed two Eagles of different ſpecies; Agamemnon, v. 115,

In plumage one of duſky hue,
And one, his dark wings edged with white.

Sophocles with great judgement ſelects the latter, in alluſion to the ſilver ſhields of the Argives.

Ere to our rampires' height aſpire
The dark-wreath'd ſmoke and waſting fire;
Such roar of war, ſuch rout, ſuch dread
The dragon race around him ſpread.
For Jove indignant hears the vaunts of pride,
And checks its frenzy's ſwelling tide;
He ſees them in th' impetuous torrent roll'd,
And glorying in the claſh of gold:
He hurls his flames; the Boaſter falls,
The ſhouts of conqueſt now loud raiſing on our walls;

STROPHE 2.

As high the fire he bore
Jove's lightening daſh'd him to the ground;
The corſe and claſhing arms rebound;
The warrior is no more,
Who ruſhing with reſiſtleſs force,
Impetuous, frentic in his courſe,
Breath'd but one little moment paſt
A ſweeping whirlwind's horrid blaſt.
Undaunted and with matchleſs might
The ſons of Thebes maintain'd the fight,
And Mars triumphant on his car
Directed all the ſtorm of war.

L. 137. Æſchylus has given the ſame ſublime image,

See an orphan race
Reft of the parent eagle, that inwreath'd,
In the dire ſerpent's ſpiry volumes, periſh'd.—Choeph. v. 245.

The alluſion to a battle between the dragon and the eagle has here a ſingular propriety on account of the dragon-race of Thebes.

At

At the ſeven gates ſeven Argive warriors raged,
But, Chief with daring Chief engaged,
Left to Tropæan Jove their glittering ſpoils.
Not ſuch th' unhappy Brothers' toils;
With ruthleſs ſpears and ruthleſs hate
They ruſh'd victorious both, both ſhared one common fate.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

The queen of glorious name,
To grace her Thebes, in gorgeous ſtate
Her high cars rolling through each gate,
Reſplendent Conqueſt came.
Let war, and arms, and hoſtile rage
No more your anxious thoughts engage;
To all the temples now advance,
Devote the night to feſtive dance;
To every god at every ſhrine,
To Bacchus chief, pay rites divine!
Let Bacchus lead the frolic train,
And ſwell through Thebes the joyful ſtrain.
But ſee the royal Creon, whoſe new ſway
The ſons of Thebes muſt now obey,
The gods aſſigning him this glorious fate,
To counſil comes in aweful ſtate;
And here, by heralds warn'd, we ſtand,
The ſages of the realm, to hear his high command.

CREON, CHORUS.

CREON.

Since now, ye men of Thebes, the gods, who ſhook

With many a ſurging wave this ſinking ſtate
Again have raiſed it from the ſtorm ſecure,
You by my heralds to attend me here
Selected I have ſummon'd; for I know
How highly you revered the throne and pow'r
Of Laius; and again when Oedipus
Was king; and, after his diſaſtrous fate,
I ſaw how firm, how loyal to his ſons
Your zeal remain'd; but now, ſince they are fallen,
Each by the other's hand, in the ſame day,
By mutual wounds and mutual guilt, the crown
And regal pow'r by right devolve on me
As neareſt to the ſlain by blood allied.
But who can penetrate man's ſecret thought,
The quality and temper of his ſoul,
Till by high office put to frequent proof,
And execution of the laws? To me
The Sovereign of a ſtate, who weak of ſoul
Adheres not to the ſageſt counſils firm,
But ſuffers fear to cloſe his lips, appears
Moſt baſe and abject; ſuch I deem him now,
And always deem'd: and him, who dearer holds
A private friendſhip than the ſecret ties
Which bind him to his country, I eſteem
A weak ſlight man. But I (all-ſeeing Jove,
Be thou my witneſs!) ne'er will cloſe my lips
In ſilence, to my people if I ſee
A threatening danger, or approaching ill:

And never will I hold that man my friend,
Who to my country bears an hoſtile mind;
Well knowing that on her we all depend
For ſafety: whilſt that bark ſecurely ploughs
A tranquil ſea, we, as we ſail, make friends.
I by ſuch rules will raiſe the Theban ſtate
To higher glory; and allied to theſe
My edict through the city is proclaim'd
Touching the ſons of Oedipus: the youth,
Who fighting for his country greatly died,
In arms illuſtrious, honour'd in the tomb
I bade them lay, with all the hallow'd rites
Paid to the nobleſt of the dead below.
But Polynices, who from exile came
Back to his country and his country's gods,
Eager to gorge himſelf with kindred blood,
And lead theſe hence as ſlaves, it is proclaim'd
That none with ſolemn obſequies entomb,
That none lament; unburied let him lie,
And let his mangled carcaſe be devour'd
By dogs and birds of prey. Such is my will.
For never to the baſe will I allow
The honours to the virtuous only due:
But he, who loves my country, ſhall by me
Alike be honour'd, let him live or die.

CHORUS.

If towards the foe and towards the friend of Thebes
Son of Menœceus, ſuch thy royal will,

To give each law its force, both on the dead
And us, whoe'er are living here, is thine.

CREON.

See that my edict be obey'd.

CHORUS.

That charge
Give to more vigorous youth.

CREON.

To watch the dead
Guards are assign'd.

CHORUS.

What more wou'dst thou command?

CREON.

Not to show grace to those who disobey.

CHORUS

None is so mad to be in love with death.

CREON.

And death shall be his meed: but oft rewards
With treacherous hope bold men to ruin lead.

CREON, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

I will not say, O king, that I am come
With hasten'd step, and breathless through my speed;
For oft I paused, deep-musing, on my way,
And oft wheel'd round with purpose to return.
My soul with many a forceful argument

Thus reaſon'd with me, "Why in evil hour
Goeſt thou where puniſhment awaits thee?—Wretch,
Wilt thou ſtay lingering here? Should Creon know
This from ſome other, how wilt thou eſcape
His vengeance?"—Muſing thus with anxious thought,
And a ſlow pace, I made a ſhort way long.
At length it was decided I ſhould come.
E'en though I tell thee nothing, I will ſpeak;
For I am come confiding in the hope
Nothing awaits me more than is decreed.

CREON.

Why is thy ſoul diſtracted with theſe fears?

MESSENGER.

Firſt of my ſelf I wiſh to ſpeak. This deed
I did not, nor who did it can I ſay;
Unjuſtly then on me would vengeance fall.

CREON.

With wary heed thou doſt entrench thee round;
Some recent deed of guilt thou wou'dſt relate.

MESSENGER.

Danger occaſions caution and delay.

CREON.

Speak then at length, and hence in ſafety go.

MESSENGER.

Now I will tell thee. Some one lately came,
Buried the dead, and went away; the corſe
With the dry duſt he lightly cover'd o'er,
And duly all the hallow'd rites perform'd.

CREON.

CREON.

What ſay'ſt thou? Who the man that dared this deed?

MESSENGER.

I know not: neither ſtroke of axe was there,
Nor with a ſpade the mold caſt up; the ground
Was firm, the ſoil unbroken, nor impreſs'd
With track of wheels; but he, who did the deed,
Left not a mark behind. When the firſt watch
Of morning ſhow'd us this, in wild amaze
We ſtood aghaſt; for, though no tomb was raiſed,
The body diſappear'd; but the light duſt
Thrown o'er it ſhow'd the haſty work of one
Who fear'd profanely to neglect the dead;
For not the trace of ſavage beaſt, or dog,
Who gorged with prey had cover'd it, was ſeen.
Harſh words with mutual clamour now roſe high,
Guard charging guard; we almoſt came to blows,
With none to mediate peace; for each to each
Seem'd to have done the deed, yet proof appear'd
'Gainſt none: "I know not" was the voice of all.
The maſs of burning iron in our hands
We all were prompt to take, to paſs through fire,
To call the gods to witneſs with firm oath
We did it not, we knew not who deſign'd,
Or who perform'd the deed. Enquiry now
Was found of no avail, when one propoſed
What made us all bend to the earth our heads
Through fear, (and nought againſt it could we ſpeak,

Nor

Nor knew we how to guide our conduct right)
That this bold deed to thee ſhould be diſcloſed,
And not conceal'd. This purpoſe was approved;
And me, unhappy me, the lot calls forth
To earn this meed. To me no pleaſure this;
No pleaſure, well I know, to you I bring.
Unwelcome he, who evil tidings bears.

CHORUS.

Long hath my mind, O king, been prone to think
That by the impulſe of the gods this deed——

CREON.

Forbear, my anger ere thou raiſe, and ſhow
Thy age unwiſe; it is not to be borne,
This vain ſurmiſe. What, think'ſt thou that the gods
O'er ſuch a wretch their guardian care extend,
And grace his body with a tomb, as one
That well deſerved, who came to ſet on fire
Their pillar'd temples, and rich-gifted ſhrines,
To waſte their favour'd land, and cruſh its laws?
Seeſt thou the gods grant honours to the vile?
It is not ſo. There are among us ſome
Who brook this ill, and murmuring ſhake their heads,
With due allegiance to my juſt command
Diſdaining to ſubmit their creſted pride:
By theſe corrupted, and for baſe rewards,
Some hirelings, well I know, have done this deed.
For never ſprung device that teem'd, like gold,
With ills to mortals; cities it lays waſte;

Impells

Impells men from their country far to roam,
Corrupts the honeſt mind, its virtuous thought
Changing to deeds of baſeneſs; the ill arts
Of treacherous falſehood it has taught, and train'd
To the dark ſcience of all impious works.
But they, who for reward perform'd theſe things,
Have earn'd in time juſt vengeance for their meed.
For, as I reverence heav'n's almighty king,
Be thou aſſured (I ſpeak it with an oath)
Find you the man whoſe hand prepared this tomb,
Bring him before me, or not death alone
Shall for your fault ſuffice, but you ſhall hang
Alive, this heinous act till you diſcloſe;
That, knowing whence your booty may be borne,
You may hereafter plunder; and be taught
That not from all things gain may be derived.
Of thoſe, who graſp at unjuſt lucre, more
In ruin ſink, than triumph in ſucceſs.

MESSENGER.

Wilt thou permit me to reply, or thus
Muſt I return?

CREON.

Doſt thou not know e'en now
How much thy words offend?

MESSENGER.

Hurt they thy ears,
Or do they wound thy mind?

CREON.

CREON.

What, wou'dſt thou ſcan

The regions of my pain?

MESSENGER.

Thy mind he wounds

Who did the deed, my words offend thy ears.

CREON.

What a quaint prater this!

MESSENGER.

Be thou aſſured

I never did this daring deed.

CREON.

For gold

Thou didſt it; bartering thy vile life away.

MESSENGER.

How cruel is ſuſpicion when unjuſt!

CREON.

Now deſcant on ſuſpicion; but take heed,
Show me who did this act, or you ſhall ſay
That puniſhment on impious gain attends. [*Exit.*

MESSENGER.

I wiſh he might be found: but be he ſeized
Or not, (be that as fortune ſhall aſſign)
Me here return'd thou ſhalt not ſee again;
For now beyond my hopes, beyond my thoughts
Preſerved I bow me thankful to the gods.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Where'er we turn our curious eyes,
Wonders through all the works of nature riſe;
But Man the chief. The foaming deep,
With all his winds though winter raves,
And round him ſwell the roaring waves,
Of danger reckleſs he dares ſweep.
The ſacred and eternal earth his toil
From year to year unwearied rends,
The proud ſteed to his purpoſe bends,
And furrows with his rolling plough the ſoil.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

His fine entangling arts enſnare
The feather'd tribes that lightly wing the air.
Each ſavage which the foreſt knows,
And all the finny race that glide
Sportive beneath the azure tide,
His line-enwoven nets encloſe.
He knows to tame the herds that wander wild;
The ſtiff-maned horſe obeys his hand,
Bends his ſtrong neck to his command,
And the reluctant mountain bull grows mild.

STROPHE 2.

The modulated voice he taught,
And train'd the mind to harbour virtuous thought.

He

He gave to life a poliſh'd form,
When firſt he bade the city riſe
A ſhelter from night's freezing ſkies,
And the ſharp arrows of the ſtorm.
O'er all victorious mounts his active mind:
E'en for diſeaſe and racking pain
Some healing balm his arts obtain,
But from the darts of death no refuge find.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Unbounded ſoars his active thought,
With high device and quick invention fraught:
And now to ill it downward leads;
Generous in virtue now delights,
And prompt to guard it's country's rights
Glory o'er all the empire ſpreads;
To baſeneſs when its wild deſign deſcends,
Deſtruction on the ſtate it draws.
Ne'er be the man, who ſpurns the laws,
Placed at my hearth, or rank'd among my friends!

CHORUS.

I ſtand aſtoniſh'd at this ſight: too well
I know her, nor this virgin can deny
To be Antigone. Unhappy child
Of an unhappy father! What means this?

L. 385. Δύσομβρα φεύγειν ἐίλη. Sophocles terms the hail "the arrows of the ſtorm." Milton has inverted the metaphor, and termed thick-flying arrows "fleet of arrowy ſhower." The metaphor in either poet is highly poetical; that of Sophocles is conceived with ſuperior boldneſs.

Thee do they lead ſeized in this mad attempt,
Found diſobedient to the king's command?

MESSENGER, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

This, be aſſured, is ſhe that did the deed:
We ſeized her as the body ſhe interr'd.
But where is Creon?

CHORUS.

Hither he returns.

CREON, MESSENGER, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CREON.

What hath befall'n? Hath juſtice reach'd th' offence?

MESSENGER.

Never ſhould man, O king, on oath proteſt
Againſt a deed; ſome unſeen cauſe may riſe,
And ſhow his former reſolution built
On falſe foundations. By thy threats appall'd
I raſhly ſaid I never would return;
Yet with a joy beyond, above all hope,
Above all other pleaſure I am come,
Though ſtrong againſt me ſtands my oath, and lead
This virgin, whom I found with her own hands
The dead interring. Now no lot was caſt,
The unexpected meed is all my own,
Not ſhared by others. Take her then, O king,
Judge her, convict her: guiltleſs I am proved,
And rightly from thy threaten'd vengeance free.

CREON.

CREON.

Thou bring'ſt this virgin, for what cauſe? where found?

MESSENGER.

Her hands interr'd the dead. Thou haſt the whole.

CREON.

Haſt thou clear proof? From knowlege doſt thou ſpeak?

MESSENGER.

I ſaw her burying him to whom thoſe rites
Thy charge forbade. Speak I now plain and clear?

CREON.

How was ſhe ſeen? how was ſhe found? How ſeized?

MESSENGER.

I will inform thee of each circumſtance.
Under thy dreadful menace to the place
Soon as we came, we ſwept the duſt away,
The dead which cover'd o'er, and laying bare
The putrid body, on the higher ground
In the free wind ſate down, th' infectious ſmell
Avoiding: man urged man, with keen reproach
Utter'd 'gainſt him who from the taſk ſhould ſhrink.
The hours thus paſs'd till in its mid-day height
Stood the ſun's radiant orb; the heat was fierce;
When ſudden from the ground a firey wind
Roſe in tempeſtuous whirls, the troubled ſky
Its wild rage rent, ſwept o'er the plain, and ſmote
The leafy branches of each bending tree;
Now the wide air was fill'd with duſt; our eyes

We cloſed by this ætherial peſt annoy'd.
At length a calm ſucceeds; the virgin then
Is ſeen, lamenting ſhrill with plaintive notes,
Like the poor bird that ſees her lonely neſt
Spoil'd of her young; ſo when ſhe ſees the dead
Expoſed uncover'd, ſhe with ſorrow wail'd,
And utter'd execrations on the head
Of thoſe who did the deed. With her own hands
Inſtant the looſe dry duſt ſhe brings, and pours,
Thrice from a fine-wrought brazen vaſe ſhe pours
Libations thrice repeated o'er the dead.
We ſee her thus employ'd, we ruſh on her,
We ſeize her, nothing at our ſight appall'd.
Both with the former and the preſent deed
We charged her; nothing ſhe denied of all.
Pleaſing at once and painful this to me:
That I am free from danger is juſt cauſe
Of pleaſure; but to danger that I lead
Thoſe whom I highly honour, gives me pain:
But nature ſo has form'd me, all theſe things
Than my own ſafety lighter I eſteem.

CREON.

Say thou, ay thou thus bending to the ground
Thy head, this heinous charge doſt thou deny?

ANTIGONE.

I did it; nor the deed will I deny.

CREON.

CREON.

* Thou may'ſt go hence; go free, where'er thy will
May lead thy ſteps, acquitted from this blame.
† Now tell me thou, and let thy ſpeech be brief,
My mandate this forbidding didſt thou know?

ANTIGONE.

I knew it; I muſt know it; wide it ſpread.

CREON.

How haſt thou dared then to tranſgreſs the laws?

ANTIGONE.

For this juſt cauſe, that nor the voice of Jove,
Nor holy Right that with the gods below
Inhabits, e'er to men ſuch laws ordain'd.
Nor of ſuch force thy edicts did I deem,
That, mortal as thou art, thou haſt the pow'r
To overthrow the firm unwritten laws
Of the juſt gods; theſe are not of to day,
Or yeſterday, but through all ages live,
And none knows whence they ſprung. Behoved me not,
Through fear of man's proud will profaning theſe,
To draw on me the vengeance of the gods.
I knew that I muſt die: this I had known,
If not proclaim'd by thee: if I ſhall die
A little ere my time, I ſhall eſteem
Death as a well-earn'd prize. What wretch, that lives,
Like me, with many ills encloſed around,

* To the Meſſenger. † To Antigone.

Would not deem death a prize? That ſuch a doom
Is then aſſign'd to me, afflicts me not;
But with tame ſufferance if a brother's corſe
Unburied I had left, that had indeed
Been deep affliction; this excites no grief.
If now my actions ſeem to thee unwiſe,
Thy thoughts with wiſdom little commerce hold.

CHORUS.

This daring ſpirit from her daring ſire
The virgin draws, to ills untaught to yield.

CREON.

But know, the vauntings of the fierceſt pride
Sink moſt; the ſtrong ſteel rigid from the flames
Through its hard temper brittle may'ſt thou ſee,
And ſooneſt ſhiver'd; the moſt firey ſteed
With a ſmall curb oft govern'd have I known.
Ill ſuits the arrogant preſumptuous mind
Thoſe that are ſlaves to others. Then ſhe learn'd
This inſult, when ſhe overleap'd the laws
Which had the ſanction of authority.
And having done the deed, ſhe further adds
Freſh inſult, glories in the bold attempt,
And proudly laughs. But I am not a man,
She is the man, if this audacious act
Paſſes unpuniſh'd. Though ſhe boaſts her birth,
The daughter of my ſiſter, were ſhe ſprung
From one more near than all whom Hercian Jove

L. 515. Ἑρκεῖος Ζεὺς, ᾧ ϑωμοὶ ἐντὸς ἕρκους ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ ἱδρυνται. Burton from Harpocration. This Jupiter was the guardian of the houſe, in the court of which his altar ſtood.

Hath

Hath to my blood allied, not e'en thoſe ties
Should ſave her from the rigor of her fate;
No, nor her ſiſter; for with equal guilt
Her too I charge, aſſociate to entomb
This corſe. But call her hither; late I ſaw
Within her raving and diſtracted mood.
The guileful mind, that forms its baſe deſigns
In darkneſs, oft ſuch fits of frenzy ſeize.
But I deteſt the wretch, who tries to dreſs,
When caught, his villanies in virtue's garb.

ANTIGONE.

Wou'dſt thou do more than kill me now ſo caught?

CREON.

No more: thy death my vengeance will appeaſe.

ANTIGONE.

Why then delay, ſince nothing in thy words
To me is pleaſing, or will ever pleaſe;
Nor will my words be pleaſing to thy ear?
A brighter glory whence could I obtain
Than from this deed, a brother's honour'd corſe
Entombing? All here preſent would aloud
Applaud the deed, but fear hath chain'd their tongues.
Amidſt their envied greatneſs kings enjoy
This pow'r, to do and ſpeak whate'er they pleaſe.

CREON.

Doſt thou alone of all the Thebans here
See this?

ANTIGONE.

Theſe alſo ſee it, but for thee
They cloſe their lips.

CREON.

But wou'dſt thou not feel ſhame,
Shou'dſt thou from theſe diſſent?

ANTIGONE.

It is no ſhame
To reverence a brother.

CREON.

Was not he,
Whom Thebes entomb'd, thy brother too?

ANTIGONE.

He was,
Of the ſame father and ſame mother born.

CREON.

How to the Youth, who for his country died,
Wilt thou ſhow honour——

ANTIGONE.

This the dead entomb'd
Will not atteſt.

CREON.

If equally thou grace
The impious?

L. 544. Omnino legendum ἐκεῖνῳ γ' εὐσεβεῖ. De Eteocle enim hic agitur, quod ex verſu abhinc altero, quo Creontis oratio imperfecta continuatur et abſolvitur, manifeſtum eſt. Mudge.

ANTIGONE.

He was not a ſlave who died,

He was a brother.

CREON.

Ravaging theſe realms

For which the other bravely fought.

ANTIGONE.

Theſe rites

Pluto demands for all.

CREON.

Not that the baſe

Be honour'd like the good.

ANTIGONE.

But in the realms

Beneath who knows if pious this be deem'd?

CREON.

A foe, though dead, can never be a friend.

ANTIGONE.

To mutual love, not hate, my nature leads.

CREON.

If thou muſt love them, to the ſhades below

Go now, and love them there; for be aſſured

No woman, while I live, ſhall bear the ſway.

CHORUS.

Before the gates Iſmene now appears,

The tears, expreſſive of a ſiſter's love,

Faſt-ſtreaming from her eyes; and o'er her brows

Sorrow hath ſpread a gloomy cloud, that dims
The glowing radiance of her beauteous cheeks.

CREON, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

CREON.

Thou, like a viper creeping through my houſe
With wily ſecreſy to drain my blood,
(For little did I think that two ſuch peſts
I nurtured, to ſubvert my throne combined)
Tell me, with her didſt thou prepare this tomb;
Wilt thou confeſs it, or abjure the deed?

ISMENE.

I did it, with my ſiſter in the deed
Conſorting, and with her partake the blame.

ANTIGONE.

Juſtice allows not this: thou hadſt no will
To aid; nor with thee did I ſhare the act.

ISMENE.

Yet in thy danger I am not aſhamed
To make my ſelf a partner of thy fate.

ANTIGONE.

Whoſe deed this is the dead and Pluto know.
Love ſhown in words alone contents not me.

ISMENE.

Yet ſcorn me not, diſdain not that I die
With thee, and pay that reverence to the dead.

ANTIGONE.

Die not with me, nor thine make thou a deed
Thou didſt not: it ſufficeth that I die.

ISMENE.

Deprived of thee, my ſiſter, how can life
Be dear to me?

ANTIGONE.

Aſk Creon: thy regard
Is paid to him.

ISMENE.

Why doſt thou give me grief,
Bringing no good?

ANTIGONE.

If I deride thee, know
That anguiſh rends my heart.

ISMENE.

What can I do
That will avail thee now?

ANTIGONE.

Preſerve thy ſelf:
I envy not thy ſafety.

ISMENE.

Wretched me,
And fail to ſhare thy fate!

ANTIGONE.

It was thy choice
To live, but mine to die.

ISMENE.

ISMENE.

But not unwarn'd
By my prophetic words.

ANTIGONE.

Thou thought'ſt them wiſe;
To me my judgement prompted other thoughts.

ISMENE.

Yet have we equal ſhare in this offence.

ANTIGONE.

Deſpond not; thou may'ſt live: my life long ſince
I gave, to pay this honour to the dead.

CREON.

Frenzy hath ſeized theſe virgins; lately one
It ſtruck, the other from her early years.

ISMENE.

Not in the wretched doth the mind, O king,
Retain its vigour; cruſh'd with ills it ſinks
Of ſenſe deprived.

CREON.

Of ſenſe waſt thou deprived,
When baſely with the baſe it was thy choice
To ſuffer.

ISMENE.

Of my ſiſter if bereft,
How can I bear to live?

CREON.

Speak not of her,
She is no more.

ISMENE.

But wilt thou kill the bride
Affianced to thy ſon?

CREON.

Some other bride
He to his bed ſhall lead.

ISMENE.

But never one
United by ſuch tender ties.

CREON.

My ſon
With a baſe woman I diſdain to wed.

ANTIGONE.

O my loved Hæmon, how thy father ſlights
Thy peace!

CREON.

Thy bridal bed, and thee alike
My ſoul deteſts.

ISMENE.

Wilt thou deprive thy ſon
Of one ſo dear?

CREON.

Theſe nuptials death ſhall end.

ISMENE.

Her doom, I ſee, is fix'd, and ſhe muſt die.

CREON.

Ay; ſo muſt thou, and I. No more delays;

Guards,

Guards, bear them hence. Theſe women muſt no more
Be left to range at large; for e'en the bold
Will fly, when death approaching near they ſee.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

How bleſt their ſtate, whoſe gladſome hours
Glide ſmoothly on, untaught to taſte of woe!
But when (heav'n-ſent) afflictions flow,
Wide-waſting the impetuous torrent pours;
The houſe from its foundations ſhakes,
And ruin all its ſons o'ertakes.
As when from Thrace the winds tempeſtuous ſweep
With dark'ning horror o'er the deep,
The boiling ſands are from the bottom torn,
And high the ſurging billows borne;
Furious they laſh the ſolid ſhore,
The promontories round rebellow to the roar.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

The houſe of Labdacus of old
In all the pomp of regal ſplendor ſtood;
Till rough misfortune's ſwelling flood
Ruin on former ruin deep'ning roll'd.
Some god adds fury to its force,
And urges its reſiſtleſs courſe;
No dams, no mounds the raging torrent ſtay,
Race after race it ſweeps away.
On the laſt branch of this imperial line
A brighter ſun now ſeem'd to ſhine;

The

The bloody duſt the dead heap'd round,
Proud ſpeech, and frenzy wild ſoon mow her to the ground.

STROPHE 2.

Shall man's preſumptuous pride controll
Thy pow'r, O ſovereign ruler of the ſkies?
Enfeebling ſleep ne'er cloſed thy eyes:
The months of gods of toil unconſcious roll;
And time, that leads old age along
Withering the vigour of the ſtrong,
Beholds thee, glorious in immortal might,
High-throned in heav'n's reſplendent light.
But this firm law, ordain'd through ages paſt,
Is now, and will for ever laſt;
No ſtate to mortals ſhall remain
From waſting ills ſecure, and ſorrow's ſickly train.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Yet Hope oft waves her wanton wings
And flattering dreams of diſtant joy inſpires;
Oft o'er man's gay and light deſires
The dreary gloom of blank illuſion flings;
Forward with eager pace he goes;
He hath no ſenſe of latent woes,
Till on the treacherous fires he treads aghaſt.
Well ſaid the Sage in ages paſt,

L. 639. Three cauſes are here mentioned as concurring to deſtroy Antigone, the reſpect ſhown by her to the bloody corſe of Polynices, her petulant anſwers to Creon, and the madneſs of her deſign: theſe, to give the tragic ſtile its elevation, are repreſented as three perſons cutting down this laſt branch of the imperial ſtem.

Vid. Valkanaer. in Euripid. Phœniſſ.

Ills they miſdeem as good, whoſe darkling mind
The god to miſery hath aſſign'd;
Heedleſs awhile through life they ſtray,
But ruin couches cloſe to ſpring upon its prey.

See Hæmon comes, the youngeſt of thy ſons,
Oppreſs'd with ſorrow for the virgin's fate,
And grieving of his bride to be deprived.

CREON.

We ſoon ſhall know more certain than the Seers.

HÆMON, CREON, CHORUS.

CREON.

Hearing the ſentence we have firmly paſs'd
On her that ſhould have been thy bride, my ſon,
Enraged againſt thy father art thou come,
Or doing this am I ſtill dear to thee?

HÆMON.

My father, I am thine: be thou my guide
Where honour calls; to follow ſhall be mine.
With me no nuptials ever ſhall be deem'd
Of higher import than thy juſt commands.

CREON.

Thus it behoves thee from thy heart, my ſon,
A father more than all things to revere.
This is the pride, the glory of a man,

L. 668. This ſeems to be a proverbial expreſſion denoting knowlege more certain than the auguries of the Seers. It finely marks the character of Creon, and prepares us for the ſcene between the tyrant and Tireſias.

To

To train obedient children in his houſe,
Prompt on his enemies t' avenge his wrongs,
And with the father's zeal in honour high
To hold his friends. But he, who nurtures ſons
That in the hour of trial from his aid
Shrink ſpiritleſs and weak, hath to himſelf
Engender'd grief, and laughter to his foes.
Then do not for a woman now, my ſon,
Debaſe thy noble mind; be not a ſlave
To pleaſure: cold is the embrace of her
Who ſhares thy nuptial bed, if baſeneſs taint
Her mind; no ulcer rankles with ſuch rage
As a falſe friend. Caſt then this virgin off
As one of hoſtile thought, and let her wed
Some other in the dreary realms below.
For ſince of all the city her alone
The laws contemning I have clearly found,
My faith, my honour to the ſtate is pledged,
And ſhe ſhall die. To Jove, who guards the rights
Of kindred lineage let her make appeal:
If thoſe, whom nature hath allied to me,
In deeds unſeemly I protect, like claim
They, who are ſtrangers to my blood, might urge
With added reaſon. For in private life
Whoever to the honour of his houſe
Is faithful found, that man will be approved
Juſt to the ſtate: but he, who ſcorns, or dares
To violate the laws, or forms a thought

To lord it o'er his rulers, ſhall from me
No praiſe obtain. He, whom the ſtate appoints
Its ſovereign, ſhould in all things be obey'd,
Their juſtice, their injuſtice, or their weight
Unqueſtion'd. In that man, who promptly pays
Obedience to his Chief, would I confide,
Aſſured that he with honour will command,
Or be commanded; in the ſtorm of war
Aſſured that he his ſtation will maintain,
A brave aſſociate. Than wild Anarchy
There is no greater ill: beneath its rage
Cities are ſunk, and houſes are o'erturn'd;
And in the conteſt of the ſpear it breaks
The battle's bleeding ranks; whilſt Order ſaves
Thoſe who obey command: by thoſe that rule
This with firm hand ſhould always be ſuſtain'd,
And never for a woman be o'erturn'd.
Better, if we muſt fall, to fall by men,
And not beneath a woman's ſpirit ſink.

CHORUS.

We judge, if not by age of ſenſe bereft,
What thou haſt ſaid, with wiſdom thou haſt ſaid.

HÆMON.

Reaſon, my father, by the gods is giv'n
To men, the nobleſt treaſure we can boaſt.
That without reaſon thou haſt framed thy ſpeech
I can not ſay, I know not how to ſay,
This with more grace ſome other may pronounce.

Me nature bids with deep attention mark
Reſpecting thee how each may ſpeak, how act,
How blame in words that would offend thy ears.
Thy preſence on the people ſtrikes an awe;
Their ſecret murmurs it is mine to hear;
For Thebes laments this virgin, as her fate
Of all her ſex the leaſt deſerving, doom'd
Moſt wretchedly for glorious deeds to die:
"That ſhe her brother's corſe, in battle ſlain,
Diſdains to leave unburied, to be torn
By hungry dogs and ravenous beaſts of prey,
Deſerves ſhe not for this the brighteſt meed
Of golden honour?" Such the general voice,
Which in dark murmurs whiſpers diſcontent.
The world hath not a treaſure which I prize
High as thy proſperous honours; to a ſon
There is no ornament to grace his name
Bright as his father's glory; and on him
Again th' illuſtrious ſon freſh glory beams.
Far be this temper from thy mind, to think
What thou may'ſt ſay, and nothing elſe, is right.
Whoe'er imagines prudence all his own,
Or deems that he hath pow'rs to ſpeak and judge,
Such as none other hath, when they are known
They are found ſhallow. There are many things
Which e'en the wiſe without diſgrace may learn,
And yield convinced. Beneath the wintry ſtorms
Thou ſeeſt the trees, that bend their heads, preſerve

Their

Their branching honours; thoſe which boldly dare
The tyrannous blaſts, uprooted fall and die.
The pilot thus, who proudly ſwells his ſails
With vigor unrelaxed, o'erſets his bark,
Then on the ſhatter'd planks at random floats.
Abate thy anger then, and let thy thoughts
Yield to cool reaſon: if my younger years
Have aught of judgement, I eſteem that man
Of moſt exalted merit, whoſe large mind
Contains all knowlege: but ſince nature deigns
This ample grace to few, from thoſe who ſpeak
And counſel well our glory is to learn.

CHORUS.

If well what prudence dictates he hath urged,
Thee it behoves, O king, to hear: and thou
To him attend. The words of both are wiſe.

CREON.

Shall I then, at my age ſhall I be taught
Wiſdom by him, by one ſo green in years?

HÆMON.

Nothing that is not juſt: though few my years,
Not what my age, but what is right regard.

CREON.

Is it then juſt to favour thoſe, who dare
To diſobey?

HÆMON.

To thoſe, whoſe deeds are ill,
I wiſh no favour.

CREON.

Hath not ſhe been found
Deep-tainted with this ill?

HÆMON.

Not ſuch the voice
Of Thebes through all its ſtate.

CREON.

Shall then the ſtate
Preſcribe to me my laws?

HÆMON.

Theſe are the words
Of inexperienced youth.

CREON.

Who then, but I,
Hath right to rule the ſtate?

HÆMON.

That is no ſtate,
Where one man lords it with deſpotic ſway.

CREON.

Is not the king lord of the ſtate?

HÆMON.

Alone
Thus o'er a deſert kingdom might'ſt thou reign.

CREON.

Mark him; he pleads a woman's cauſe.

HÆMON.

If thou
A woman art; for thee my zeal is warm.

CREON.

CREON.

Thou baſeſt of mankind, wilt thou oppoſe
Thy father's will?

HÆMON.

I ſee my father err
Wide from the laws of juſtice.

CREON.

Do I err
Strengthening my ſovereign pow'r?

HÆMON.

That gains no ſtrength
From inſult to the gods.

CREON.

Degenerate mind,
Beneath a woman's ſunk!

HÆMON.

To baſeneſs ſunk
Me never ſhalt thou ſee.

CREON.

For her thy tongue
Now argues.

HÆMON.

And for thee, and for my ſelf,
And for th' infernal gods.

CREON.

She ſhall not live
To be thy bride.

HÆMON.

HÆMON.

And if ſhe dies, alone
She ſhall not die.

CREON.

What, is thy daring pride
Ris'n to this height, to threats?

HÆMON.

What threats, to plead
Againſt a raſh decree?

CREON.

Of wiſdom void
Thou ſhalt be taught with ſorrow to be wiſe.

HÆMON.

I will not ſay my father is unwiſe.

CREON.

Thou woman's ſlave, forbear; urge me no more.

HÆMON.

Is it thy will to ſpeak, and nothing hear?

CREON.

It is. But by the heights of heav'n I ſwear,
Thou ſhalt not in thy inſults long rejoice.
Bring forth that hated wretch; before his face
Now in her bridegroom's preſence let her die.

HÆMON.

Not in my preſence: no; before my face
She ſhall not die; admit not ſuch a thought;
Nor ſhalt thou ever ſee my face again.

Associate with thy friends, and spend thy rage
'Mongst those, who tamely will thy frenzy bear.

CREON, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

In rage with hurried step the youth is gone:
To deeds of fierceness grief such spirits works.

CREON.

Let him then go, and dare beyond his might:
These virgins from their doom he shall not save.

CHORUS.

Is it thy purpose then that both should die?

CREON.

No; not the guiltless. I approve thy words.

CHORUS.

What death to the offender is decreed?

CREON.

Deep in a yawning cave beneath a rock
From human footsteps far removed, alive
I will enclose her, and a little food
Only allow, that no unhallow'd stain
Pollute the state. There to th' infernal king,
Of all the gods whom she reveres alone,
Pouring her vows she haply will obtain
That she die not; or rather learn at length
How little reverence to the dead avails.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

O Love, reſiſtleſs in thy might,
Triumphant o'er the pow'r of gold,
In youth's ſoft cheek with beauty bright
Joying thy ſweet domain to hold,
Thou ruleſt o'er th' extended main,
The rural hut, the paſtoral plain;
Thy pow'r th' immortal gods obey,
And mortal men confeſs thy ſway:
But all, who feel thy piercing darts,
Feel madneſs rankling in their hearts.

ANTISTROPHE.

By thee the virtuous mind beguil'd
Baſely to wrong is drawn aſide;
By thee contentions fierce and wild
Raiſe ſtorms in hearts by blood allied.
Deſire, in flames now ſeen to riſe
Caught from the virgin's radiant eyes,
Diſdains the curb of Laws to own,
But with them ſhares their potent throne;
While Venus, ſovereign of the ſoul,
Victorious ſmiles, and ſcorns controul.

E'en I at this ſad ſight beyond due bounds
Am carried, and the fountain of my tears
No longer can reſtrain, whilſt I behold
Antigone thus borne to ſhare the bed
Of death, the common bed where all repoſe.

ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ANTIGONE.

Ye reverend men, inhabitants of Thebes,
My country, you behold me treading now
For the laſt time theſe paths, the ſun's bright beams
For the laſt time beholding, never more:
For me the all-compoſing hand of death
Leads to the diſmal banks of Acheron;
No nuptial rites, no hymeneal ſong
Are mine; to Acheron a bride I go.

CHORUS.

Therefore illuſtrious and with praiſe obtain'd
Wilt thou go down to the dark cave of death.
Not waſted by the pains of ſlow diſeaſe,
Nor by the ſword cut off, doſt thou deſcend,
But, as none other, by thine own free choice,
And living, to the monarch of the dead.

ANTIGONE.

Thus on the heights of Sipylus of old
The Phrygian ſtranger miſerably died,
Daughter of Tantalus; the rigid rock,
Like ivy wreath'd around her, and ſubdued
Her vital pow'rs. Her, melting into dews
Faſt-trickling, (ſuch the voice of fame) e'en now
The currents fail not, but the guſhing tears
Stream from her eyes, and down the mountain flow.
A doom like hers hath fate to me aſſign'd.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

She was divine, and ſprung from race divine;
But we are mortal, and of mortals born.
For thee how glorious then to ſhare like fate
With thoſe of heav'nly race, and as the gods
Revered, like them to live, like them to die!

ANTIGONE.

Nay, do not mock me; by my country's gods
Inſult me not ere I am ſunk in death,
While yet I ſtand before your eyes. O Thebes,
And you, the ſplendid habitants of Thebes
With various treaſures rich! Ye ſacred founts
Of Dirce, and thou grove of Thebes, whoſe glades
Are open to the frequent-rolling cars!
You all can witneſs for me, how by friends
Unwept, and by what laws I go condemn'd
To the rude priſon of the hollow rock,
Of this unwonted tomb. Unhappy me,
I have, or in my life, or in my death,
No dwelling with the living, or the dead!

CHORUS.

Thy daring was extreme, and thy offence
'Gainſt the high throne of juſtice. O my child,
O'er thee ſome treſpaſs of thy father hangs!

ANTIGONE.

Oh, thou haſt touch'd the griefs that rend my heart
With ſharpeſt pangs, my father's mournful fate
Through the wide world divulged, and all the ills

Which

Which ſunk th' illuſtrious houſe of Labdacus!
Ye horrors of my mother's nuptial rites,
My father in unhappy hour ye led
To the ſame couch from which he took his birth;
And thence, O miſerable me, I ſprung!
With them accurſed, unwedded, I deſcend
To ſhare their gloomy manſions. Fatal too
Thy nuptials; O my brother: thou, though dead,
Draw'ſt me, yet living, to the realms below.

CHORUS.

To act with piety denotes a ſoul
Touch'd with religious awe: but the high pow'r
Of thoſe inveſted with the ſovereign rule
May never be tranſgreſs'd. Indignant pride,
Fix'd to its purpoſe, hath thy ruin wrought.

ANTIGONE.

No pitying tear, no friend, no nuptial rites
Are mine, as thus unhappy I am led
This deſtined way. No more ſhall I behold
The ſacred orb of yon bright-beaming ſun;
Yet not one friend laments or weeps my fate.

CREON, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CREON.

If mournful cries and wailings before death
Avail'd, there is not one, be well aſſured,
That e'er would ceaſe them. Inſtant take her hence,
Encloſe her in the rock's ſepulchral cave,

As I commanded, leave her there alone,
Either to die, or there to live entomb'd.
We from her death receive no ſtain: but ſhe
No more ſhall with the living converſe hold.

ANTIGONE.

O thou dark tomb, thou rugged bridal bed,
Deep manſion, which ſhalt ever cloſe me round,
To thee I go; I go to join my friends,
A numerous train, whom ſunk among the dead
Hath Proſerpine received. I go the laſt
And moſt unhappy, ere th' allotted ſpace
Of life I reach. Yet glowing at my heart
I feed this hope, that to my father dear,
And dear to thee, my mother, dear to thee,
My brother, I ſhall go; ſince with theſe hands
Your bodies I with cleanſing lavers waſh'd,
Added each ritual ornament, and pour'd
Libations at your tombs. And now thy corſe,
Loved Polynices, in the earth I laid,
And for the pious deed have this reward;
Yet thoſe of better judgement will approve
My care, which paid theſe honours to the dead.
Were I a mother now, were I a wife,
Mouldering in death if child or huſband lay,
I would not, if the ſtate oppoſed the deed,
In ſuch a taſk engage. Aſk you what rules
Direct my conduct? If an huſband dies,
Another might be wedded; to a child,

One loſt, another father might give birth:
But when both parents in the earth are laid
Entomb'd, a brother can no more be born.
Me, by theſe thoughts impell'd with hallow'd rites
To honour thee, my brother, Creon deem'd
Deep-ſtain'd with guilt, and daring heinous deeds;
He ſeized me, with rude hands he leads me now
Of nuptial rites, of hymeneal ſong,
Of bridal bed deprived, and the ſweet joys
A mother in her children's nurture knows;
But thus oppreſs'd with wretchedneſs, by friends
Abandon'd, to the caves of death I go
Alive. What rites, what honours of the gods
Have I tranſgreſs'd? But why, unhappy me,
Why to the gods look more? What heav'nly pow'r
Shall I invoke, ſince for my pious deeds
I bear the vengeance to the impious due?
If this the juſtice of the gods demands,
And I offend, theſe ſufferings I forgive:
If theſe offend, no greater ill be theirs
Than they to me unjuſtly have aſſign'd.

CHORUS.

The tempeſt of her paſſions yet is high;
The ſame impetuous ſpirit rules her yet.

CREON.

For this the ſlaves that lead her ſhall be taught
With tears their ſlow obedience to repent.

ANTIGONE.

Death from that menace is not diſtant far.

CREON.

I will not ſooth thee with the flattering hope
That thy fix'd doom ſhall ever be reverſed.

ANTIGONE.

Thou city of my fathers, royal Thebes,
And you, who from my country drew your birth,
Ye gods, I hence am forced; I am no more!
And you, who o'er the Theban ſtate preſide,
See the laſt virgin of an honour'd line,
Your kings; ſee what I ſuffer, and from whom,
See me condemn'd for pious deeds to die!

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Thus the beauteous Danae lay
Long doom'd in braſs-girt walls to dwell,
Denied the ſun's ætherial ray
Encloſed in her ſepulchral cell:
Yet her rich illuſtrious blood
From a long line of Argive monarchs flow'd;
And ſhe, unconſcious of his ſecret love,
Cheriſh'd the golden gems of Jove.

L. 993. This timid and ſervile Chorus had not the ſpirit even to intercede for the generous Antigone; and now ſhe is led to death, inſtead of pitying her unhappy fate, they poorly put us off with cold unintereſting narrative. The ſtory of Danae is well known. After the birth of Perſeus, ſhe and her infant ſon were encloſed in a cheſt, and thrown into the ſea. The poet here alludes to this, as well as to the tower of braſs. The ſtory of Lycurgus is alſo well known: his puniſhment is differently related; Sophocles here repreſents him as thrown into a dungeon.

O fate, reſiſtleſs is thy pow'r,
Triumphant o'er the heav'n-deſcended ſhow'r,
The rampired wall, war's furious train,
And the black bark that rides the roaring main!

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Thus the Thracian king, whoſe pride
Daſh'd the ſcorn'd Thyrſus to the ground,
And dared th' avenging god deride,
In chains of rigid rock lay bound:
Sunk his ſoul to deep diſmay,
His fury melted by degrees away;
Now knew he that his rude unhallow'd pride,
By frenzy fired, a god defied;
For he ſevere with ſtern diſdain
From their loved Orgies awed the raptured train,
Forbade the Bacchic torch to ſhine,
And ſcorn'd the tuneful Muſes' ſong divine.

STROPHE 2.

Nigh the claſhing rocks, whoſe brow
Frowns o'er the double ſea that roars
Foaming with angry waves below,
You ſaw, ye wild Boſphorean ſhores,
Thracian Salmydeſſus ſaw
(Where Mars the neighbouring cities holds in awe)

L. 1017. Theſe claſhing rocks, the Symplegades or Cyaneæ Petræ, are mentioned by Euripides. See his Medea, l. 2. n. and Iphigen. in Taur. l. 487.

How did they paſs the dangerous rocks
Claſhing with rude, tremendous ſhocks?

The

The ſons of Phineus, and the wound abhor'd;
You ſaw their darken'd eye-balls gor'd;
Nor ſword, nor ſpear, nor dart was found,
Unhappy youths, to give the wound:
See where the ſavage ſtepdame ſtands,
The pointed ſhuttle arms her bloody hands.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Waſting in their dreary cell
(The hope of nuptial joys no more)
With woe and darkneſs doom'd to dwell,
Their mother's miſeries they deplore:
Yet her pure and noble blood
Rich from the high-born Erecthidæ flow'd;
And where the rock its winding caverns forms,
Nurtured amidſt her father's ſtorms,
Swift as the courſer's rapid flight
The virgin bounded o'er the mountain's height:
But fate with aged ſtep and ſlow
O'ertook her ſpeed, and chain'd her down to woe.

TIRESIAS, CREON, CHORUS.

TIRESIAS.

Ye rulers of the Theban ſtate, we come
As is our wont, both ſeeing with the eyes
Of one: the blind ſome leading hand require.

L. 1023. Phineus married Cleopatra, the daughter of Boreas and Orithyia, by whom he had two ſons, Crambis and Orythus. He afterwards repudiated her, and married Idæa, the daughter of a Thracian king. This barbarous ſtepmother put out the eyes of Crambis and Orythus; Cleopatra, to eſcape her cruelty, concealed her ſelf amidſt the rocks, where ſhe died. To this circumſtance the Chorus alludes. See Natal. Com.

CREON.

Aged Tireſias, what of import high
Hath now ariſen?

TIRESIAS.

That I will impart:
And thou obey the Seer.

CREON.

Did I e'er ſlight
The wiſdom of thy mind?

TIRESIAS.

The realms of Thebes
Through dangers therefore ſafely haſt thou ſteer'd.

CREON.

To thy ſage counſils much indeed I owe.

TIRESIAS.

Be counſel'd now: fate hangs upon this hour.

CREON.

What may this be? I tremble at thy words.

TIRESIAS.

Hear what my ſkill hath mark'd, and thou wilt know.
Placed on my antient ſeat of augury,
Whence all my auſpices I draw, the voice
Of birds I hear; unknown the ſound; their ſcreams
Were wild and ſtrange, of ill preſage; and fierce
With bloody talons each the other rent.
I knew this; for the claſhing of their wings
Gave not dark ſigns: I trembled, and explored

The hallow'd fires that on the altars burn.
But from the ſacrifice no flame ſhone bright,
Nor vapour from the humid fleſh aroſe;
It waſted on the aſhes, and roll'd low
A dull black ſmoke, exſuding on the fire;
The entrails ſwell'd and burſt; the melting thighs,
Shrunk from th' involving cawls, lay bare. Theſe ſigns
Of dark and dangerous import from my boy
I learn'd; to me he ſhows them, and my voice
Explains to others. From thy harſh reſolves
Theſe omens threat the ſtate; the birds of prey,
And dogs, whoſe ravenous hunger hath devour'd
The hapleſs Polynices ſlain in war,
Pollute our public altars: for this cauſe
Our pray'rs, our victims the offended gods
Accept no more; no hallow'd flames aſcend;
No more are heard th' auſpicious notes of birds
Gorged now with human fleſh. Weigh theſe things well,
My ſon; to all of mortal race to err
Is common; but that man is not unbleſt,
Nor unadviſed, who having err'd, and felt
The ill awaiting error, heals the wound,
Nor perſeveres unmoved: th' obdurate mind
Pays dear for its perverſeneſs. To the ſlain
Be then appeaſed: why wou'dſt thou wound a corſe?
A brave man wars not with the dead. With thought
To thee benevolent I well adviſe.

Moſt

Moſt pleaſant is inſtruction when it comes,
And with it comes advantage, from the wiſe.

CREON.

I am your mark, old man; and all your ſhafts
At me are aim'd; nor are the prophet's arts
'Gainſt me unpractiſed: by this venal race
I as a ſlave am ſold, and led away.
Purſue your traffic; be the precious ore
Of Sardis, and the Indian gold, your gain;
Him in the earth you never ſhall entomb.
No; would the eagles of almighty Jove
Bear to their ſovereign's throne his mangled fleſh,
I would not, dreading that pollution, yield
To lay him in the tomb; for well I know
That mortals never can pollute the gods.
Yet there are men, thou aged ſeer, held high
For various excellence, who baſely fall,
By ſordid lucre when allured they ſpeak
The words of baſeneſs urged in honour's ſtile.

TIRESIAS.

Is there a man that knows, is there a man
That comprehends——

CREON.

What wou'dſt thou? To us all
Is this addreſs'd?

TIRESIAS.

With what high excellence
Wiſdom tranſcends all treaſures?

CREON.

This he knows,
Who knows that folly is our greateſt bane.

TIRESIAS.

Heavy on thee hangs that diſeaſe.

CREON.

Reproach
I would not harſhly on the Seer retort.

TIRESIAS.

Thou doſt reproach me, when thou ſay'ſt my voice
Announces falſehoods.

CREON.

You are fond of gold,
All the prophetic tribe.

TIRESIAS.

The tyrant loves
Treaſures by baſeneſs gain'd.

CREON.

Know'ſt thou thy words
Are to a king addreſs'd?

TIRESIAS.

I know it well;
For o'er a kingdom ſaved by me thy reign
Thou holdeſt.

CREON.

As a Seer I deem thee wiſe,
But as a man unjuſt.

TIRESIAS.

TIRESIAS.

The dark decrees
Of fate, which in my breaſt I would have kept
Conceal'd thou wilt compell me to diſcloſe.

CREON.

Diſcloſe them then, but not through hopes of gain.

TIRESIAS.

Reſpecting thee I have no hope of gain.

CREON.

But know, my purpoſe never ſhall be ſold.

TIRESIAS.

And know thou well that ere the rapid wheels
Of the ſun's chariot many circles roll,
One ſprung from thee, thy offspring, thou ſhalt pay
Dead for the dead a recompence, for thoſe
Whom from the light of life to the dark realms
Thou haſt ſent down diſhonour'd, and entomb'd
In the rock's dreary cavern; and for thoſe
Whom of the honours to the gods below,
Of ſolemn obſequies, and hallow'd rites
Thou haſt deprived; a deed, that nor to thee
Belongs, nor to the gods above; a deed
Of tyrant force: the ſlow-avenging pow'rs,
The Furies of th' infernal gods, for this
In ambuſh wait to ſeize thee, and in ills
Like theſe will plunge thee. Go now, ſee if gold
Hath bribed the prophet's mercenary voice:
Paſs a few moments, the laments of men,

The

The ſhrieks of women through thy houſe ſhall ſound.
Indignant all the hoſtile ſtates are rouſed,
Whoſe mangled dead the dogs or beaſts of prey
Have in theſe plains polluted, or the birds
Of obſcene wing, bearing th' unhallow'd ſtench
E'en to the ſacred altars of the gods.
Theſe are the ſhafts (for thou haſt moved my ſoul
To anger) which at thee I aim: their force
Strikes deep, nor ſhalt thou ſhun the burning wound.
Boy, lead me hence; and let him vent his rage
On thoſe of freſher years; or curb his tongue
With modeſty, and learn to train his mind
To gentler thoughts than thoſe which now it bears.

CREON, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

The Seer is gone, O king, and hath foretold
Things dreadful: never from my earlieſt youth
To theſe grey hairs now ſcatter'd o'er my head,
Knew I his voice prophetic to the ſtate
Aught falſe, or faithleſs in th' event pronounce.

CREON.

I know it; and diſtraction rends my mind.
To yield, would wound me deep; but to oppoſe,
With keener agonies would pierce my ſoul.

CHORUS.

Son of Menœceus, prudence is required.

CREON.

What muſt I do? Thy counſil ſhall prevail.

CHORUS.

Go, from the rock's dark cave the virgin raiſe,
And for the outcaſt dead erect a tomb.

CREON.

Doſt thou approve this? Wou'dſt thou that I yield?

CHORUS.

And inſtantly, O king: malignant minds
The vengeance of the gods with ſpeed o'ertakes.

CREON.

My heart reluctant yields to thy advice;
But with Neceſſity we may not ſtrive.

CHORUS.

Go thou, nor others with this charge entruſt.

CREON.

Inſtant I go. You, my attendants, haſte,
With axes in your hands haſte to the plain.
And I (ſince now my ſentence is reverſed)
Who bound her, will in perſon ſet her free.
I fear that to preſerve the antient laws
Through all his life is man's diſcreeteſt part.

*CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

O thou by various names renown'd,
The Theban Nymph's illuſtrious grace,
Sprung from enraptured Jove's embrace,
While all his aweful thunders roll'd around;

Who

* The Chorus, no longer awed by the preſence of the tyrant, or intimidated by his threats,

Who joy'ſt thy richeſt gifts to pour
O'er bleſt Italia's favour'd ſhore,
And on the hallow'd Eleuſinian plain
Where Ceres waves her ripen'd gold,
With her thy myſtic reign doſt hold;
God of the ſhouting Thyad train,
Pleaſed o'er the walls, which thy loved Thebes encloſe,
A preſent guardian to preſide,
Where deep Iſmenus rolls his tide,
'Midſt the fierce race that from the dragon roſe!

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Thee ſaw the wild and rocky ſteep,
Whoſe forked ſummits proudly riſe,
And ſtretch their rude brows to the ſkies,
Where the Corycian Nymphs their orgies keep:
Thee, the flames blazing on the mount:
Thee, pure Caſtalia's ſacred fount:
Thee, the Nyſæan mountain's craggy ſides,
O'er which the mantling ivy twines:
The ſwelling hillocks green with vines,
Whoſe purple fruit their foliage hides;

threats, aſſume the dignity and ſacredneſs of their character; and in this religious Ode, which is truly a tragic hymn in the original acceptation of the word, invoke the protection of Bacchus, the tutelary god of Thebes.

L. 1184. This mention of Italy has a peculiar propriety, as the Tuſcans were religious obſervers of the rites of Bacchus.

L. 1197. Euripides alſo mentions this fire ſacred to Bacchus near one of the ſummits of Parnaſſus,

ἵνθα πῦρ πηδᾷ θεοῦ
Βακχεῖον· Ion, v. 1125.

And waking harmony's enchanting pow'rs,
On thee attends thy raptured train,
Raiſes the high immortal ſtrain,
And hails thee guardian of the Theban tow'rs.

STROPHE 2.

The Theban tow'rs their rampires rear,
Thy guardian care their boaſt, their pride;
They to thy mother too were dear,
Who in the flaming thunder died.
Now, while her banners Diſcord waves,
While through our ſtreets Confuſion raves,
Prompt to avert our threaten'd woe
Haſte from the ſteep Parnaſſian brow,
Or from Eubœa's groaning ſhore,
And to thy Thebans peace reſtore!

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Thou leader of the ſtarry train
That flaming burſts upon the ſight;
Director of th' harmonious ſtrain
Whoſe ſweet notes charm the ear of night;
Hear, ſon of Jove, O Bacchus, hear,
Bright in thy form divine appear;
Thy frentic Nymphs from Naxos lead,
The frolic dance who lightly tread,

L. 1217. This alludes to the flaming torches, which Bacchus and his female attendants carried in their nocturnal orgies. So Euripides, Bacchæ, l. 153.

But Bacchus, waving in his hand
The torch that from his hallow'd wand
Flames high, his roving Bacchæ leads.

And, as around their god they ſtand,
Hail thee the leader of their band!

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

Inhabitants of Thebes, the honour'd ſeat
Of Cadmus and Amphion, ſuch the life
Of man, ſo unaſſured his fickle ſtate,
I cannot prize it high, nor would diſpraiſe:
For fortune ever raiſes or caſts down
The happy, and th' unhappy, at her will,
And no man can divine the fates to come.
Such was the ſtate of Creon, it from me
Excited admiration; from its foes
He ſaved this land, o'er all its realms obtain'd
The monarchy, reign'd ſole with ſovereign pow'r,
And flouriſh'd in a noble race of ſons.
Now all is loſt: for when the joys of life
Man knows no more, may he be ſaid to live?
He breathes, but hath not life. Nay, let his houſe
Be ſtored with riches, let a monarch's pomp
Attend him; yet 'midſt theſe if heart-felt joy
Be abſent, all the reſt I would not prize,
Nor purchaſe with the ſhadow e'en of ſmoke.

CHORUS.

What ills, that cauſe the royal houſe to mourn,
Comeſt thou to tell us?

MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

They are dead: thoſe live
Who cauſed their death.

CHORUS.

Inform us whoſe this deed,
Who lies in death?

MESSENGER.

Hæmon is dead; he lies
Welt'ring in blood.

CHORUS.

Slain by his father's hand,
Or by his own?

MESSENGER.

By his own hand he died,
Againſt his father for the virgin's death
Enraged.

CHORUS.

What truths, O Seer, thy voice announced!

MESSENGER.

Theſe are fullfill'd: yet others claim our thought.

CHORUS.

But ſee Eurydice, th' unhappy wife
Of Creon: theſe ſad tidings ſhe hath heard,
Or chance hath brought her from the royal houſe.

L. 1250. Mr. Heath judiciouſly obſerves that the word ἀυτόχειρ here, and in ſome other places, ſignifies ſimply interfectus. Vid. ſupra v. 56. 178. In Ajace v. 852. Æſchylum in Septem ad Thebas v. 810. Had other critics adverted to this, they would have ſpared their cenſures here.

EURYDICE, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

EURYDICE.

Ye citizens of Thebes, I heard the voice
Of rumour, as I came forth, at the ſhrine
Of Pallas ſuppliant to addreſs my vows:
The bars, that cloſed the gates, it chanced my hand
Was opening, at that inſtant the report
Of ill my houſe affecting reach'd my ear.
With terror ſtruck in my attendants' arms
I ſunk, and life forſook my fainting frame.
But tell me all; repeat the mournful tale;
In woes not unexperienced I ſhall hear.

MESSENGER.

My honour'd Miſtreſs, I will tell thee all,
(For I was preſent) nor conceal the truth.
Why ſhould I flatter, when a little time
Would ſhow my falſehood? Truth is always plain.
I to the ſummit of the field thy lord
Attended, where expoſed and torn by dogs
The wretched corſe of Polynices lay:
Him (our vows firſt to Proſerpine addreſs'd
And Pluto, that propitious now their wrath
They would avert) in hallow'd lavers cleanſed
On a green pyre of new-pluck'd boughs we laid,
And burn'd the mangled relicks; then raiſed high
The earth contiguous, a ſepulchral mound.
Thence to the virgin's cavern'd rock we go,
The nuptial couch of Death; when of our train

One

One heard the diſtant ſounds of loud laments,
Which echoed round that bridal bed of Death
With obſequies unhonour'd: to his lord
He bears the tidings. As the king approach'd,
The hollow murmurs of a voice reſound;
Deeply he ſigh'd, and ſpoke theſe mournful words,
" Are then my fears prophetic? Do I tread,
Unhappy me, a path that leads to woe
The moſt afflicting? Moaning to my ear
Comes my ſon's voice. You, that attend me, go,
Haſte to the cavern, from its mouth remove
The rock's obſtructing maſs; ſtand near, obſerve
If Hæmon's voice I hear, or by the gods
I am deceived." Obeying theſe commands,
Utter'd in deep deſpair, we went, we look'd,
And in the cave's extreme receſs beheld
The virgin ſtrangled; round her neck the zone,
Which bound her flowing robes, her hands had twined.
She lay, and near her lay the youth, his arms
Claſp'd round her, mourning the unhappy fate
Of his loſt bride, his father's ruthleſs deeds,
And all his nuptial joys thus ſunk in woe.
When Creon ſaw him, with a mournful groan
He enter'd, and lamenting thus exclaim'd,
" O my unhappy ſon, what doſt thou here?
What is thy purpoſe? What calamity
Hath ſunk thee thus? Come from this cave, my ſon,
Suppliant thy father begs thee." His wild eyes

The youth roll'd fiercely round, and gave ſtrong proof
Of ſtern diſdain and hate; nor made reply,
But drew his pointed ſword: his father's flight
The ſtroke prevented: then th' unhappy youth
Turning his rage againſt himſelf, while yet
His arm was raiſed, in his own ſide plunged deep
The furious weapon, and, retaining yet
His ſenſe, around the virgin threw his arms
Yet warm, and there expired, with his laſt breath
Diſtaining her pale cheeks with drops of blood.
Dead with the dead he lies, and in the houſe
Of Pluto celebrates his nuptial rites;
A melancholy proof that raſh deſigns
Bring the ſevereſt miſeries on man.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Canſt thou conjecture what this means? The queen
Is gone, and not a word burſt from her lips.

MESSENGER.

I am aſtoniſh'd; but my hopes are warm
That dignity of mind from public view
Reſtrains her grief for her ſon's fate: retired
Amidſt her female train ſhe may indulge
Her ſighs and ſtreaming tears: from raſh attempts
Her prudence oft experienced is her guard.

CHORUS.

I know not: but a ſilence ſo reſerved

Imports ſome dread event; ſuch are my thoughts:
A clamorous ſorrow waſtes it ſelf in ſound.

MESSENGER.

Let us draw near the houſe; we ſoon ſhall know
If fatal purpoſe in her troubled mind
Secret ſhe harbours: wiſe is thy remark;
Silence oppreſſes with too great a weight.

CHORUS.

But ſee, the king advances, in his hands
Bearing the ſignal token of his woes.
Not from another, might I freely ſpeak,
But from himſelf aroſe this fatal ill.

CREON, CHORUS.

CREON.

Alas the frenzies of a wayward mind
Ill-judging, rigorous! See their deathful fruits,
The dead to thoſe who ſlew them how allied!
Theſe are my unbleſt counſils! O my ſon,
My ſon! Untimely is thy fate, cut off
In youth's freſh prime: yet thou waſt blameleſs; all
The fatal raſhneſs, all the guilt is mine.

CHORUS.

At length, O king, thou ſeeſt what juſtice is.

CREON.

Too late I learn it now; then, then the god
Laid on my head this load, impell'd me then

To theſe rough paths, and all our high-raiſed joys
Spurn'd to the ground. Oh vain, vain toils of men!

ATTENDANT, CREON, CHORUS.

ATTENDANT.

My royal lord, what dreadful ills are thine!
Theſe in thy hands thou beareſt; in thy houſe
Others await thee: thou wilt ſee them ſoon.

CREON.

Is there aught worſe? Is there aught elſe of ill?

ATTENDANT.

Thy queen, the mother of this breathleſs youth,
Gored with freſh wounds, unhappy, is no more.

CREON.

O thou polluted port of death, why thus,
Why thus doſt thou deſtroy me? What ill ſounds,
Ah me, of dreadful utterance haſt thou ſent!

CHORUS.

Thou haſt brought death to one already dead.

CREON.

What ſay'ſt thou? This is new: and death on death
Is heap'd. My wife a bleeding victim ſlain!

ATTENDANT.

Thou may'ſt behold her, to the private ſcenes
Allotted to the females not removed.

L. 1354. The joys ariſing from the defeat of the Argives.

CREON.

Wretch that I am, another ill I ſee,
A ſecond ill; and me, unhappy me
What fate yet waits? Before me lies my ſon
Late ſlain, and there another new in death;
Unhappy mother, and unhappy ſon!

ATTENDANT.

Beſide the altar by a ſudden wound
She fell, and cloſed her eyes in endleſs night;
But firſt lamented the illuſtrious cave
Of Megareus, her ſon firſt loſt; then mourn'd
The fate of Hæmon; and with ſolemn grief
Bewail'd thy cruel deeds which ſlew thy ſons.

CREON.

Chill horror ſhakes my frame. O wretch, wretch, wretch!
Will no kind hand plunge deep th' avenging ſword,
Deep in my breaſt, and end an hated life
Conflicting 'midſt inextricable woe?

ATTENDANT.

Amidſt her anguiſh with her dying breath
She charged thee with the death of both her ſons.

CREON.

How did her hand inflict this deadly wound?

ATTENDANT.

Soon as ſhe heard her ſon's lamented death,
In her ſad heart ſhe plunged the fatal ſword.

L. 1378. Euripides gives this ſon of Creon and Eurydice the name of Menœceus. His generous ſpirit and death make a fine epiſode in the tragedy of the Phœnician Virgins.

CREON.

CREON.

Not on another can this fault be charged;
No; it is all my own; the deed was mine;
I, O my ſon, I ſlew thee! Lead me hence,
Far hence with ſpeed oh lead me, for I now
Am nothing; no; I have no being now.

CHORUS.

Well haſt thou judged, if aught in ills be well.
Calamities, when preſent to the view,
Though ſlight, with keeneſt anguiſh pierce the ſenſe.

CREON.

Advance, advance, appear thou laſt and beſt
Of all my fortunes; bring my final day;
Haſte, that another day I ne'er may ſee!

ATTENDANT.

Theſe things are future, leave them to the gods.
But what is preſent how muſt we diſpoſe?

CREON.

But what I warmly wiſh I made my pray'r.

ATTENDANT.

Make now no wiſh, no pray'r: to mortal man
There is no refuge from his deſtined woe.

CREON.

Take hence this lifeleſs ſhadow. O my ſon,
I ſlew thee, but I purpoſed not thy death!
Thee too, my wife, I ſlew. Unhappy me!
Ah, which way ſhall I turn? where reſt my thoughts?

All is distraction, all is ruin; fate
Bursts on my head, resistless in its force.

CHORUS.

To happiness the best, the surest guide
Is wisdom: but irreverence to the gods
Becomes not mortal man; the mighty vaunts
Of pride, with mighty punishments repaid,
Teach his old age thus humbled to be wise.

THE

TRACHINIAN VIRGINS.

TRACHINIAN VIRGINS.

THE

TRACHINIAN VIRGINS.

SOPHOCLES is ſaid to have drawn his women ſuch as they ought to be. Deianira is a bright example of conjugal affection; the unhappineſs of her ſituation, working upon the tender ſenſibility of her mind, diffuſes a ſoft and gentle melancholy around her; one ray of joy ſhines through this gloom of ſorrow, but it is only a tranſient beam, which leaves her involved in darker ſhades. In the moſt trying circumſtance that can affect the heart of a woman ſhe feels the injury, and complains of it in ſecret to her female friends, but without any violence of reſentment, without any intemperate aſperity; to recover the wandering love of Hercules is her only ſolicitude; the unhappy meaſure, which ſhe takes to effect this innocent purpoſe, brings on the dreadful cataſtrophe of the drama. As this meaſure could not with propriety have been carried into execution without the approbation, at leaſt without the aſſent of the Chorus, and as the cautious prudence of old age could not have approved it, the Poet has with great judgement formed the Chorus of young and unexperienced Virgins.

The delineation of Hercules in ſo terrible a ſtate required the utmoſt ſkill of Sophocles; he has managed it with wonderful propriety: the hero could not be repreſented either as amiable or virtuous; Hercules was yet a mortal man; but that ſuch a man, "with all his imperfections on his head," ſhould after his deceaſe be enrolled among the gods, is a proof of the wretched ſtate of religion and morality in that age; that thoſe divine honours were continued ſhows how little the moſt enlightened ages of Greece had advanced in real knowlege.

The great art of the poet in this drama is ſhown in the gradations of diſtreſs, from the firſt plaintive melancholy of Deianira to the laſt agonies of Hercules, wrought up with that chaſte ſimplicity which always diſtinguiſhes real genius. To feel this in its full force we need only read the Hercules Oetæus of Seneca; all there is "the very torrent, tempeſt, and whirlwind of unmeaning paſſion;" it is a tale told by an ideot, full of ſound and fury, ſignifying nothing.

The ſcene is before the royal palace at Trachin, a town ſituated near Mount Oeta. Ceyx was then its king.

Perſons of the Drama.

DEIANIRA.
HYLLUS.
LICHAS.
HERCULES.
ATTENDANTS.
CHORUS of TRACHINIAN VIRGINS.

THE TRACHINIAN VIRGINS.

DEIANIRA, FEMALE ATTENDANT.

DEIANIRA.

OF old this saying hath 'mongst men been famed,
That of man's life, till death hath closed the scene,
We know not to decide, to term it blest,
Or wretched. Of my life I can decide,
Ere to the regions of the dead I go;
I know it to misfortune doom'd, and grief.
E'en with my father Oeneus when I dwelt
At Pleuron, much I suffer'd through the dread,
More than Ætolian virgin ever felt,
Of hated nuptials; for the River came

L. 8. Strabo speaks of Pleuron as in antient times one of the greatest ornaments of Greece. It was the residence of the kings of Ætolia.

My

My wooer, Achelöus; in three forms
Me of my father he demanded; now
He walk'd a Bull, a Dragon now he roll'd
His ſpotted wreaths, now wore the human form
With a Bull's head disfigured, copious ſtreams
Of fountain water flowing down his cheeks
With hair thick-ſhaded. Dreading to receive
A wooer ſo abhorr'd, my conſtant wiſh
Was death, to ſuch a bridal bed preferr'd.
At length, though late, th' illuſtrious ſon of Jove
And of Alcmena came, to me what joy!
He with the monſter in fierce fight engaged,
And ſet me free: his dangerous toils diſtinct
I cannot tell thee, for I know them not;
Whoe'er unterrified beheld that fight,

L. 13. The claſſical reader will recollect inſtances enough of rivers thus deſcribed, and needs not to be informed of the reaſons of this poetic imagery. The ingenious author of the Hiſtory of the Heavens aſſigns a very different cauſe. The inhabitants of Memphis, he ſays, ended their harveſt about the time when the Sun enters the Bull; that animal therefore became the ſymbol of harveſt and plenty in that diſtinguiſhed province: and they gave the Nile the head of a Bull, to ſhew that he was the father of the harveſts of Ægypt; and this is the reaſon why other rivers are deſcribed under the ſame form; for though they do not overflow, like the Nile, yet they never fail to fertilize the plains through which they wind their courſe. Hiſtoire du Ciel poetique.

L. 22. Strabo tells us that the Achelöus often overflowed its banks, and rendered the boundaries between Ætolia and Acarnania diſputable, which had been the cauſe of many battles. He then, from this paſſage of Sophocles, ſpeaks of the combat between Hercules and Achelöus; and adds that thoſe, who ſearch for truth through poetic fables, ſay that Hercules reſtrained theſe inundations by ſtrong embankments, and by cutting channels drained great part of the Parachelois; from the firſt work the poets repreſent him as rending off an horn of the Bull; from the fertility, which the ſecond work produced, they formed the fable of the Horn of Amalthea. Strabo. Lib. x.

Let him relate it; all my ſenſe was loſt
In fear, leſt ſorrows fatal to my peace
My beauty ſhould perchance produce. At length
The arbiter of battles, ſovereign Jove,
Diſpoſed th' event to glory and to joy,
If joy: for wedded now to Hercules,
My much-loved hero, fear ſucceeding fear
Anxious for his dear ſake I ſtill ſuſtain;
For the night brings him to me, and the night
Drives him away to toil that follows toil.
I bore him children; theſe he ſeldom ſees;
As one that hath acquired far diſtant fields,
Which only when he ſows and when he reaps
He viſits; ſuch the life, that brings my lord
Back to his houſe, and ever ſends him thence
On ſome harſh ſervice: now, theſe toils atchieved,
I thence feel greater fears; for ſince he ſlew
The mighty Iphitus, at Trachin here
Exiled we dwell, with hoſpitable rites
Received; but whither he is gone none knows;
But he is gone, with pangs of piercing grief
Rending my heart, for I have cauſe to fear
That evil hath befall'n him; no ſhort time,
But ten ſlow months have roll'd away, and five
Added to theſe, yet abſent he remains,
Nor have I tidings of him; there muſt be
Some dreadful ill; at his departure ſuch
The writing he left with me; to the gods

My

My earneſt ſupplications oft I pour
That no affliction thence may be derived.

ATTENDANT.

My miſtreſs, Deianira, I long time
Have ſeen thy ſorrows and thy frequent tears,
Mourning the abſence of thy lord: and now
If by a ſlave's advice the nobly born
May be admoniſh'd; me if it becomes
So to preſume; whence is it that with ſons
Thus bleſt, not one of them is ſent to ſeek
Thy lord; and Hyllus chief, whom moſt the charge
Beſeems, if aught his father's wellfare moves
His anxious care? And ſee, with manly ſtep
He to the houſe advances: if my words
Deſerve attention, thou haſt now the pow'r
To give th' important mandate to the youth.

HYLLUS, DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT.

DEIANIRA.

My child, my ſon, the meanly born may give
Generous advice: this woman, though a ſlave,
Hath ſpoken what denotes a liberal mind.

HYLLUS.

Inform me what, if I may be inform'd.

DEIANIRA.

Thy father abſent in a diſtant land
So long, ſhe deems it ſhame that ſearch by thee
What region thus detains him is not made.

HYLLUS.

If credence to report be due, I know.

DEIANIRA.

Where doth fame ſay, my ſon, that he reſides?

HYLLUS.

All the paſt year in ſordid taſks employ'd,
And by a Lydian woman held a ſlave.

DEIANIRA.

If he bore this, what more may we not hear?

HYLLUS.

It is reported he hath burſt thoſe bonds.

DEIANIRA.

Living or dead where is he ſaid to be?

HYLLUS.

In arms, and in Eubœa, 'gainſt the ſtate
Of Eurytus advanced, or on his march.

DEIANIRA.

Know'ſt thou th' unerring prophecies, my ſon,
That land reſpecting, which he left with me?

HYLLUS.

What are they? Never have they reach'd my ear.

DEIANIRA.

That there his life will end; or, conqueſt there
Obtain'd, his future days ſhall all be bright,
Without one cloud of adverſe fortune more.
And wilt not thou, my ſon, whilſt now his fate
Hangs doubtful, fly to aid him? For with him

We ſhare one fortune; in his fall we fall,
And in his ſafety we our ſafety find.

HYLLUS.

Mother, I go: had this prophetic voice
Been earlier known to me, I had long ſince
Been preſent to his aid; now, thus inform'd,
Theſe things attentive I will trace, nor ceaſe
Till all the truth I know: but the ſucceſs,
My father's arms accuſtom'd to attend,
Forbids diſmay, and all exceſs of fear.

DEIANIRA.

Go then, my ſon; good fortune, though late known,
Brings a warm welcome to the anxious mind.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

O thou, whom ſaphir-ſpangled Night
(That vanquiſh'd flies before thy golden ray)
Calls forth thy orient luſtre to diſplay,
And curtains cloſe thy ſetting light,
To thee, O Sun, I call; declare,
Bright blazing through the lucid air,
Where dwells the hero through this length of time?
Where does Alcmena's ſon reſide?
Rolls he on ocean's billowy tide?
Lies he repoſed in ſome ſoft eaſtern clime,
Or where decline thy weſt'ring rays?
Oh ſay, for all thy piercing eye ſurveys!

ANTIS-

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Deſire, and doubt, and anxious fear
Inceſſant harrow Deianira's breaſt;
Like the poor bird that wails her widow'd neſt,
As from her eye ſtill ſtreams the tear,
Mindful ſhe mourns her lord, each thought
With terrors at his wand'rings fraught,
And at imagined dangers melts away:
As on her lonely couch ſhe lies,
The ſleepleſs night ſhe waſtes in ſighs,
And ſinks to ſorrow and deſpair a prey;
Whilſt to her fancy ills unknown
In all their hideous threat'ning ſhapes are ſhown.

STROPHE 2.

As when with terror we behold
From South or North the wild winds ſweep,
Waves after waves with fury roll'd
Swell the vex'd boſom of the deep;
Such is the Theban Hero's ſtate,
Toſt in the ceaſeleſs ſtorms of fate.
Toils riſe on toils, an endleſs train,
As billows on the troubled main;
Yet to his virtues juſt ſome god
Saves him from Pluto's drear abode.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Let me then blame thy anxious fear;
Far other views if I diſplay,
My words bring comfort to thy ear:
Thou ſhou'dſt not throw ſweet Hope away.
The ſovereign ruler of our fate
Gives mortals no untroubled ſtate;
But joy and grief are ever found
Revolving their alternate round,
As circling in the Arctic ſkies
The conſtellations ſet and riſe.

EPODE.

Nor Night in ſable ſtole array'd
O'er mortals always ſpreads her ſolemn ſhade;
Nor always griefs remain,
Nor riches; their light wings at once they ſpread,
Away at once are fled;
The heart now welcomes joy's bright train,
Now ſickens at th' approach of pain.
Then ſink not, Queen, with griefs oppreſt,
But let hope brighten in thy breaſt;
Jove o'er his ſons his care extends,
And all his glorious race defends.

DEIANIRA.

Inform'd, I ween, of my afflictions thou
Art preſent here: what anguiſh rends my heart
May'ſt thou ne'er know by ſuffering; thou as yet

Art

Art inexperienced. Youth at random roves
O'er its own flow'ry fields; nor ſcorching heat
Nor ſhow'r annoys it, nor the noxious force
Of boiſterous winds; in pleaſures it ſupports
A life that knows not trouble, till the name
Of virgin now is loſt in that of wife:
Then firſt ſhe ſhares anxiety; the night
Then for her huſband bids her wake to fears,
Or for her children; then ſhe may be taught
By her own feelings what th' oppreſſive woe
That weighs me down. My tears have often flow'd
For many ſufferings; but my preſent grief
Springs from ſuch cauſe as never roſe before;
This I will tell thee. When my royal lord
On his laſt emprize iſſued from his houſe,
He left with me a writing of old date,
His mandates, which before when marching forth
To many conteſts he forbore to ſhow,
But went as to o'ercome, and not to die.
But now, as to return no more, he gave
In charge what portion for my nuptial dow'r
I ſhould receive, and to his ſons aſſign'd
To each his ſhare of his paternal land:
Nay, he the time determined; from theſe realms
Beyond the complete year three waining moons
Should he be abſent, then the fates require
That he muſt die; the dangers of that time
Should he ſurmount, then all his future life

Will pass unshaded with affliction's cloud;
To all the toils of Hercules, he said,
Such is the period by the gods assign'd;
Thus at Dodona the prophetic Doves
Gave from their antient beech the voice of fate.
These truths are certain, and the present time
Gives dreadful expectation of th' event;
So that, loved virgins, from sweet sleep I start,
Distracted with my fears lest I remain
Now of the noblest of mankind bereaved.

CHORUS.

Be thy words now of happier import; see
A messenger arrives; his laurel wreath
Gives token that his tidings are of joy.

ATTENDANT, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

ATTENDANT.

My royal Mistress, I am come the first
To bear thee tidings, which from all thy fears
Will set thee free: know then Alcides lives,
And is victorious; to his country's gods
He brings the consecrated spoils of war.

L. 193. This oracle at Dodona was of the highest antiquity, and celebrated for its truth. Herodotus was informed by its priestesses that two black doves, flying from Thebes in Ægypt, rested on this beech, and in an human voice declared that an oracle of Jupiter must be fixed there. He supposes that some Phœnician rovers had brought two priestesses from Thebes: the colour of the doves, and the rites observed in consulting the oracle, show them to be Ægyptian. The name of one of these holy women is said to be Peristera, which in the Greek language signifies a dove: this among so fanciful a people was foundation enough for the fable.

DEIANIRA.

DEIANIRA.

What doſt thou tell me? What import thy words?

ATTENDANT.

To thy warm wiſh thy huſband in his houſe
Will ſoon appear with his victorious force.

DEIANIRA.

This information from the citizens
Received, or from ſome ſtranger, doſt thou bring?

ATTENDANT.

The herald Lichas in the verdant mead
Theſe things announces loud. I heard, and ran
The firſt to greet thee with theſe words of joy,
To win thy favour, and obtain ſome boon.

DEIANIRA.

Why comes he not, of triumphs if he ſpeaks?

ATTENDANT.

That is not eaſy, Lady; all her ſons
Melia pours forth, who eager to enquire
Throng cloſe around him, and retard his ſteps;
Impatient each the welcome news to learn,
Till all his ardent wiſh be gratified,
Suffers him not to paſs; hence his delay,
To him unpleaſing, grateful to the croud:
But ſoon thou may'ſt expect to ſee him here.

DEIANIRA.

O Jove, adored on the uncultured mead

L. 219. Melia was a town of Theſſaly near Trachin.

Of Oeta, thou, though tedious the delay,
Haſt giv'n us joy. Ye virgins, who abide
Beneath this royal roof, and you who tread
With me this court, raiſe high th' enraptured voice
Of gratulation; for beyond my hopes
On me a ray of orient brightneſs beams.

STROPHE.

In the chaſt and ſecret ſhrine
Raiſe the loud and feſtive ſtrain,
Thou, for whom the virgin train
Bids the nuptial torches ſhine.
Let the ſpritely youths around
Catch the ſweet entrancing ſound,
And to the golden-quiver'd king,
To Phœbus, Pæans, joyful Pæans ſing.

ANTISTROPHE.

Virgins riſe, the raptures ſhare;
To Ortygian Dian high
Swell the voice of harmony:
Hers the double torch to bear;
Hers the flying hind to chace,
'Midſt the Nymphs of mountain-race:
I riſe ſublime; without controul
Thou reign'ſt, ſweet Pipe, the monarch of my ſoul.

L. 244. As Hecate, bearing a torch in each hand.

L. 248. This breathes the ſame ſpirit of poetical enthuſiaſm as Pindar's ἀναξιφόρμιγγες ὕμνοι. Olymp. Ode 2.

EPODE.

EPODE.

The Thyrſus round with ivy twin'd
To raptured frenzy ſwells my mind;
I long to join the Bacchic train:
Evoe! Raiſe th' extatic ſtrain.
Now bid farewell, loved queen, to woe:
See, in pure ſtreams thy joys begin to flow.

DEIANIRA.

I ſee, loved virgins, yes, my watchful eye,
Not faithleſs to its office, ſees this train.

LICHAS, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIANIRA.

Herald, to joy I welcome thee, though late
Be thy arrival, if thou bring'ſt me joy.

LICHAS.

With joy we greet thee, lady, and with joy
Are greeted; ſuch the meed our acts deſerve.
The hero, that with glory hath atchieved
His enterprize, the voice of welcome earns.

DEIANIRA.

Thou art moſt welcome. Firſt, what moſt I wiſh,
Tell me, alive ſhall I receive my lord?

LICHAS.

I left him in ſound health, alive, and high
In vigorous ſtrength, with no diſeaſe oppreſs'd.

DEIANIRA.

Where? In his native, or a foreign land?

LICHAS.

On the Euboic ſtrand, where he prepares
Altars and offerings to Cenæan Jove.

DEIANIRA.

A vow? or by ſome oracle required?

LICHAS.

A vow, when his victorious ſpear laid waſte
The country of theſe women, whom thou ſeeſt.

DEIANIRA.

Who, by the gods, and whence are theſe? If right
I judge of miſery, wretched is their ſtate.

LICHAS.

Theſe, when the town of Eurytus he razed,
He for himſelf ſelected, and the gods.

DEIANIRA.

Advanced againſt this town was he engaged
In tedious war all this vaſt length of time?

LICHAS.

No: but in Lydia he was long detain'd
Not free, ſuch his account, but ſold a ſlave.
We ſhould not cenſure, Lady, what appears
Wrought by the hand of Jove. Betray'd, and ſold
To the barbaric Omphale, he paſs'd
One tedious year a ſlave: but the diſgrace
So ſtung his noble ſoul, that with an oath

L. 269. So called from Cenæum, a promontory of Eubœa, where an altar was erected to him.

He

He vow'd the author of this wrong, his wife,
And children ſhould be ſlaves; nor vow'd in vain;
But, expiation made, with ſocial hoſts
Vengeful he march'd againſt the rampired walls
Of Eurytus, for him of all mankind
Alone he deem'd the cauſe of his diſgrace,
Who, to his hearth when he approach'd, a friend
With hoſpitable rites received of old,
Inſulted him aloud with taunting words,
And all the outrage of an hoſtile mind;
Reviling him as holding in his hands
Arrows by fate aſſign'd to reach the mark,
But that his ſons excell'd him in the ſkill
To draw the bow; that by the nobly born
He as a ſlave ſhould be trod down and cruſh'd;
Nay more, with wine when heated from his houſe
He ſpurn'd him forth. Indignant at theſe wrongs,
O'er the Tirynthian hills when Iphitus
Search'd for his ſteeds that from their paſtures roved,
His eye on other objects bent, his mind
On other thoughts engaged, he hurl'd the youth
From the ſteep ſummit of the tow'ring rock.
Offended at the deed Olympian Jove,
The ſupreme king and father, ſent him thence

L. 289. Hercules removed from Tirynthia to Trachin in voluntary baniſhment for the murder of Iphitus; but his active ſpirit could not reſt there; he went further and, as Lichas tells the ſtory, was ſold as a ſlave to Omphale for a year, that being the uſual time of atonement for murder; the year being elapſed, and expiation made, he now advanced to execute his vengeance on Eurytus.

To ſlavery ſold, nor brook'd a treacherous act
Unpractiſed but againſt this hapleſs youth:
With manly fortitude and front to front
In arms had he oppoſed him, heav'n's high king
Had pardon'd him, and deem'd his vengeance juſt;
But baſe inſidious wrong the gods abhor.
But all thoſe boaſters, whoſe reviling tongues
Were wanton in their inſolence, have now
Their manſions in the gloomy realms beneath,
And their proud city is enſlaved. Theſe dames,
Which here thou ſeeſt, from high and happy life
Sunk to this wretched ſtate attend thy will.
Such are thy lord's commands, which I perform
With faithful zeal. When to his father Jove
The hallow'd victims for his conqueſt vow'd
Are ſlain, expect him here: of my long ſpeech,
Though grateful all, this gives thee higheſt joy.

CHORUS.

Now, royal lady, certain joy is thine;
This captive train gives proof of his report.

DEIANIRA.

Yes, my heart feels it; I have cauſe, juſt cauſe
Of joy; it bounds to hear my lord returns
Victorious; all within me is alive
To tender ſympathy. Yet thoſe, who deep
Revolve the change of fortune, muſt have fears
Leſt he, who triumphs now, may ſome time know
A ſad reverſe. E'en now, my friends, my heart

Feels the warm touch of pity, while I see
These wretched females from their country torn,
Torn from their parents, in a foreign land
To exile doom'd; yet these perhaps are sprung
From generous lineage, but must now sustain
A servile life. O Jove, whose guardian pow'r
Averts misfortune, never may I see
My offspring by thy anger thus assail'd;
Or if to sufferings thou hast doom'd them, spare
My anguish, nor inflict them whilst I live!
Such are my fears, these females as I view.
But who amidst this youthful train art thou?
Ill chance is thine: unmarried is thy state?
Or dost thou feel a mother's grief? Thy mien
Denotes thee virgin, and of noble blood.
Who is this stranger, Lichas? Whence her birth?
Tell me: my pity most for her is moved,
For she alone shows fortitude of mind.

LICHAS.

What can I know? Why ask of me? Perchance
She may from no ignoble race be sprung.

DEIANIRA.

Is she from Eurytus of royal birth?

LICHAS.

I know not; nor minute enquiry made.

DEIANIRA.

From her associates heard'st thou not her name?

LICHAS.

LICHAS.

No: for in ſilence I my charge perform'd.

DEIANIRA.

Speak then, unhappy virgin; let thy voice
Inform me; for I feel a ſoft concern,
And painful not to know thee who thou art.

LICHAS.

She will not ſpeak; nor hath ſhe to this hour
Unlock'd her lips, or ever utter'd word;
But obſtinate in ſilence mourns her weight
Of miſery, always weeping ſince ſhe left
Her deſolated country: her ill fate
Moves thee to pity and to pardon her.

DEIANIRA.

Then let her be indulged, and in the houſe
Find courteous treatment: to her preſent ills
I would not that from me freſh grief, her griefs
Augmenting, ſhe receive; ſhe hath enough
Of woe already. To our houſes now
Let us all go; where thy occaſions call,
Go thou; domeſtic duties claim my care.

DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT, CHORUS.

ATTENDANT.

Stay yet a little, that from theſe apart
Thou may'ſt be ſhown what perſons to thy houſe
Thou haſt admitted. Truths, of which no part

Thou

Thou yet haſt heard, and which behoves thee hear,
I know, and can with faithful zeal impart.

DEIANIRA.

What wou'dſt thou ſay? Why thus detain me?

ATTENDANT.

Stay,
And hear me: not before did I abuſe
Thy ear with falſe reports; nor ſhall I now.

DEIANIRA.

Thoſe, late departed hence, ſhould I recall,
Or to theſe virgins wou'dſt thou ſpeak, and me?

ATTENDANT.

To thee and theſe I ſpeak without reſtraint;
But let thoſe go.

DEIANIRA.

Well, they are gone; now ſpeak.

ATTENDANT.

Nothing of what this herald lately ſaid
Accorded with the laws of honeſt truth;
But now he utters falſehoods, or before
Dared to deceive the ear with falſe reports.

DEIANIRA.

What ſay'ſt thou? Plainly tell me all thy thought:
Thy words are dark; I underſtand them not.

ATTENDANT.

I heard this man, and many preſent heard
His words, declare that for this virgin's ſake

This war 'gainſt Eurytus Alcides made,
And the high-tower'd Oechalia Love alone
Of all the gods incited him to arms;
And not his Lydian ſlavery, and baſe taſks
By Omphale commanded, nor the death
Of Iphitus hurl'd headlong from the rock.
This love conceal'd, the herald other pleas
Deviſed. But when his lord had urged in vain
The ſire to give the daughter to his bed
In ſecret nuptials, he aſſign'd ſome cauſe
Of ſlight and trivial charge to march in arms
Againſt her country, where the royal throne
Was held by Eurytus; he ſlew the king
Her father, and his waſted city razed.
Her, as thou ſeeſt, returning he now ſends
Thus, lady, not without peculiar care,
Not as a ſlave; admit not ſuch an hope;
It is not to be thought, ſince love enflames
His ſoul. By duty prompted I to thee
What was my chance to learn from him diſcloſe:
And this, not I alone, but many heard;
For 'midſt the conflux of Trachinians round
Aſſembled he declared it; and to theſe
I make appeal. Unwelcome to thy ear
If what I tell thee, I have no delight
In ſpeaking it, but what I ſpeak is truth.

DEIANIRA.

Unhappy me, what ſnares encloſe me round!

Ah,

Ah, what a ſecret poſt have I received
Beneath my roof! This wretch then hath no name,
So he that led her ſwore, with all theſe charms,
This beauteous form, and dignity of mien!

ATTENDANT.

From Eurytus ſhe drew her royal birth,
And Iole her name; yet of her race
He could not ſpeak, he no enquiries made.

CHORUS.

Ruin to all the baſe I would not wiſh;
But periſh he, who forms the vile deſign
With dark and treacherous baſeneſs to betray.

DEIANIRA.

How, virgins, ſhould I act? For at this tale
In wild amazement all my ſenſe is loſt.

CHORUS.

Go, make enquiries of the man, add threats
Of torture, ſoon he will confeſs the truth.

DEIANIRA.

I go: to thy advice my mind accords.

CHORUS.

Should we await thee here? or what thy will?

DEIANIRA.

Stay here: for ſee, the man, uncall'd by me,
Of his own will advances from the houſe.

DEIANIRA, LICHAS, ATTENDANT, CHORUS.

LICHAS.

What wou'dſt thou, Lady, that I bear in charge
To Hercules? I haſten my return.

DEIANIRA.

After ſo long an abſence why ſo ſoon
Depart, ere my enquiries I renew?

LICHAS.

More wou'dſt thou aſk? I to inform thee ſtay.

DEIANIRA.

But wilt thou anſwer me with honeſt truth?

LICHAS.

To what I know; be witneſs mighty Jove!

DEIANIRA.

Who is this woman, hither whom thou led'ſt?

LICHAS.

A native of Eubœa; of what race
I know not.

ATTENDANT.

Herald, fix thine eye on me.
Know'ſt thou to whom thou ſpeak'ſt?

LICHAS.

With what intent
That queſtion doſt thou aſk?

ATTENDANT.

If thou doſt bear
The ſpirit of a man, be bold, and ſpeak.

LICHAS.

LICHAS.

To Deianira, to the queen I ſpeak,
Daughter of Oeneus, wife of Hercules,
My royal miſtreſs; or I ſee in vain.

ATTENDANT.

This was my wiſh to know. Didſt thou not ſay
She is thy royal miſtreſs?

LICHAS.

With juſt right.

ATTENDANT.

Tell me what puniſhment is then thy due,
If to thy miſtreſs thou art found not juſt?

LICHAS.

And how not juſt? With what inſidious wiles
Wou'dſt thou enſnare me?

ATTENDANT.

Fear not wiles from me;
Thy thoughts are all employ'd on wiles.

LICHAS.

I go,
Unwiſe thus far to hear thee.

ATTENDANT.

Hence thy foot
Thou ſhalt not ſtir till, one ſhort queſtion aſk'd,
I have thy anſwer.

LICHAS.

Aſk whate'er thou wilt;
Thy tongue, it ſeems, can ſpeak.

ATTENDANT.

This captive then,
Whom thou haſt brought, who is ſhe? doſt thou know?

LICHAS.

Who is ſhe?——Why is this enquiry made?

ATTENDANT.

Haſt thou not ſaid that ſhe, on whom thine eye
Look'd as on one unknown, was nobly born
Of Eurytus, and Iole her name?

LICHAS.

To whom ſaid this? Whom bring'ſt thou to atteſt
That from my lips ſuch words he ever heard?

ATTENDANT.

The citizens: for the Trachinians round
In crouds aſſembled heard thee ſpeak theſe words.

LICHAS.

I ſaid indeed I heard this; but to ſpeak
On mere imagination, and to affirm
As certain, merit not a like regard.

ATTENDANT.

Imagination! Didſt thou not on oath
Declare thou brought'ſt the wife of Hercules?

LICHAS.

I ſay ſhe was his wife! Now, by the gods,
Who, honour'd lady, is this ſtranger here?

ATTENDANT.

One, who in perſon heard thee ſay his arms

Subdued

Subdued the country for this virgin's ſake:
That not his Lydian ſlavery, but the love
Of her ſpread devaſtation o'er her realms.

LICHAS.

The man is frentic: Lady, ſend him hence:
With ſuch to hold vain converſe is not wiſe.

DEIANIRA.

By Jove, who rolls his thunders through the grove
That ſhades the brow of Oeta, do not hide
The truth: to no baſe woman wilt thou ſpeak,
Nor to an untaught mind that hath not mark'd
Man's nature, form'd not always to delight
In what once pleaſes. He, 'gainſt Love who ſtands
In daring oppoſition, is unwiſe.
Love at his pleaſure lords it o'er the gods,
O'er me too; why not o'er another then
E'en ſuch as I? Should I then blame my lord
As vanquiſh'd by this pow'r; or ſhould I blame
This woman, who to me cauſes no ill,
Nor brings diſhonour, I were mad indeed.
It is not ſo. But if by him thy mind
To falſehood hath been train'd, no honeſt lore
Haſt thou been taught: if from thy ſelf thou draw ſt
This glozing ſcience, when thy heart ſhall prompt
To open faith, diſtruſt with jealous eye
Will look on thee as baſe: let then thy tongue
Always ſpeak truth: on the free man, who bears
The hateful brand of falſehood, ſhame attends.

Can'ſt thou eſcape detection? Vain that hope:
What thou to many haſt divulged, to me
Some will diſcloſe. If thou haſt fears, thoſe fears
Are vain and cauſeleſs: not to be inform'd,
Aye, that indeed would grieve me; but to know,
Can that be dreadful? Hath not Hercules
Admitted others to his nuptial bed,
And many? Yet not one of thoſe e'er heard
Harſh word from me, or keen reproach; nor now
Shall this Eubœan, though with love ſhe melt
His yielding heart. Her, moſt of all the train,
Soon as I ſaw, I pitied: well I know
Her beauty hath undone her; cruel fate,
And not her will, hath on her country brought
Ruin and ſlavery. Of theſe things no more;
I give them to the winds. But mark thou well
My charge, on others practiſe thy deceits,
But always let thy tongue ſpeak truth to me.

CHORUS.

This is for thine advantage; be adviſed:
The time will come when thou wilt not repent
So doing; my eſteem too thou wilt gain.

LICHAS.

My honour'd miſtreſs, ſince I ſee thee moved
By ſoft humanity, and not unlearn'd
In human nature, I no more will hide
Aught from thy knowlege, but diſcloſe the truth.
It is as this man ſaid; with love of her

Was

Was Hercules enflamed; and for her ſake
Her father's realm, Oechalia, by the ſpear
Was waſted wide. Theſe things (for of my lord
Thus I muſt ſpeak) he gave me not in charge
To hide, nor were they by himſelf diſown'd:
This fault was mine, if it be deem'd a fault;
For I was fearful, lady, leſt thy breaſt
By tidings ſo unwelcome I ſhould wound.
And now, ſince all the truth to thee is known,
For his ſake, for thine own, with kindneſs treat
This woman; be thy promiſed courteſy
Confirm'd; for he, who glorious in his might
Triumph'd o'er all, is by her love ſubdued.

DEIANIRA.

Such is my purpoſe; no augmented load
Of ills ſpontaneous on my ſelf to draw,
Contending with the gods. Retire we now
Beneath this royal roof, thou ſhalt receive
My mandates; for his preſents in return
I ſhall ſend preſents; theſe too thou ſhalt bear;
Not to ſend ſomething by thee were unjuſt,
Who cameſt attended with a ſplendid train.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Sovereign, reſiſtleſs in her ſway
O'er the charm'd heart victorious Venus reigns.
Not her ſweet force, which Gods obey,
Which Jove's firm ſoul ſubdued, attunes theſe ſtrains;

Which

Which taught the gloomy Pow'r to bow,
The monarch of the realms below;
And him, who gives his thundering waves to roar,
And furious shake the solid shore.
To other themes these humbler strains belong:
The warring rivals claim the song,
In arms contending for this bride,
The contest dust, and toil, and wounds decide.

ANTISTROPHE.

Rising in all his strength the Flood,
In form a Bull terrific to the sight,
Ætolian Achelous stood,
With horns his threat'ning forehead arm'd for fight.
From Thebes the Chief of mighty fame
Fierce to the rough encounter came,
The son of Jove; his massy club he rears,
His bow unbent, his arrows bears.
Enflamed with jealous love and rival rage
In horrid combat they engage;
While Venus with severe delight
Awards the prize, and arbitrates the fight.

EPODE.

Dauntless each the fight provokes,
Loud the thunder of their strokes;
The clanging bow now aims the wound;
With dreadful clash the Bull's strong horns resound.

Now front meets front, the furious blow
With horrid conflict threatens death;
Now in ſtrong graſp each ſtruggling foe
Strains every nerve, and lab'ring pants for breath.
Meanwhile the beauteous Nymph, whoſe charms
Enflamed the combatants to arms,
Anxious and doubtful of her fate
Conſpicuous on the river's margin ſate;
(My ſong records the voice of fame)
All was ſuſpenſe and aweful dread,
Till victor now the hero came,
And from her mother's arms the trembling virgin led.

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIANIRA.

Whilſt with theſe female captives in the houſe
My gueſt, on his departure bent with ſpeed,
Holds converſe, unobſerved to you, my friends,
Hither I come, to tell you what device
Theſe hands have form'd, and for my ſufferings raiſe
Your ſympathetic pity; for no more
A virgin deem I that I here received,
But one who ſhares his bed; as in his bark
The mariner admits a baneful freight.
And now the ſame embrace in the ſame couch
We both await: ſuch is the recompence
The good and faithful Hercules, ſo call'd,
Repays me for my long and anxious care.

Yet my heart knows not anger that he yields
Oft to this weakneſs; but to live with her
In the ſame houſe, with her my nuptial bed
To ſhare, what woman can bear this? I ſee
Her age, it daily opens to freſh bloom,
While mine is in the ſere: the eye of man
Delighted views the vernal glow, and loves
To crop the flow'r; but from the fading leaf
Turns with diſguſt away: hence riſe my fears
Leſt Hercules, in vain my huſband call'd,
Give to her younger beauties all his love.
Yet not for this doth anger, as I ſaid,
Become a prudent woman. But, my friends,
What I poſſeſs of pow'r to heal my griefs
I will inform you. In a brazen vaſe
A preſent from the antient Centaur long
Have I preſerved; while yet in youth's freſh bloom
This from the ſhaggy Neſſus I received
When dying from his wound. It was his wont
O'er the deep flood Evenus rolls to bear
For hire, who wiſh'd to reach the further bank,
In his ſtrong arms; nor daſhing oar was his,
Nor barge with ſwelling ſails. Me thus he bore,
When, unattended with my father's train
I followed Hercules; but when he reach'd
The middle of the ſtream, his wanton hands
'Gainſt modeſty tranſgreſs'd; I cried aloud:
The ſon of Jove ſprung forward, in his hand

His

His ready bow, from which a feather'd ſhaft
Wing'd with impetuous fury pierced his ſide.
Me then the dying monſter thus addreſs'd,
Daughter of aged Oeneus, I no more
Shall paſs this flood; but ſince my arms have borne
Thee their laſt charge, derive thou thence this good,
Obſervant of my words: Preſerve with care
The clodded blood which iſſues from my wound;
The gore of the Lernæan Hydra tinged
The blacken'd ſhaft; this will have pow'r to charm
The heart of Hercules to thee aſſured;
That never woman ſhall his eyes behold
Fair and attractive of his love, like thee.
To memory this recalling (for with care
The dying Centaur's gift I have preſerved)
With it, my friends, this veſtment I have tinged,
Nothing omitted which he gave in charge
While yet he lived. Theſe things are now prepared.
The boldneſs of ill arts I would not know,
I would not learn; thoſe women I abhor
Who dare attempt them: yet her youthful bloom
Could I by charms o'ercome, and ſooth the heart
Of Hercules to love, I would aſſay
Their potency: but if you deem th' attempt
Unmeet, or void of force, I will forbear.

CHORUS.

If thou haſt aught of confidence in deeds
Like this, we judge that thou haſt purpoſed well.

DEIANIRA.

My confidence is only ſuch as gives
Strength to opinion, not aſſured by proof.

CHORUS.

Then put it to the proof; opinion elſe,
Though built on reaſon, no aſſurance yields.

DEIANIRA.

We ſoon ſhall know, for Lichas from the gate
I ſee advance; he quickly will be here.
Only be ſecret; for e'en ſhameful things
In dark concealment are ſecured from ſhame.

LICHAS, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

LICHAS.

Daughter of Oeneus, give me thy commands;
Too long already I have linger'd here.

DEIANIRA.

Lichas, in this my care hath been employ'd,
Whilſt converſe with the ſtrangers thou haſt held,
That thou may'ſt bear this beauteous-woven veſt,
Wrought by my hands, a preſent to thy lord.
This give him, with a charge that but himſelf
No mortal in it proudly be array'd;
Nor ever let the ſun's reſplendent beam
Behold it, nor the altar's ſacred flame,
Nor the bright-blazing hearth, till he ſhall ſtand
In public view, and ſhow it to the gods,
When on ſome ſolemn day the victim bleeds:

For ſuch my vow, if e'er I ſaw or heard
That he return'd in ſafety, with this robe
To deck his perſon, that before the gods
Gorgeous in new attire he might appear,
And offer ſacrifice. Bear this, in proof
I gave ſuch charge; my ſignet he will know.
Now go, and take good heed not to preſume
Beyond thy orders; ſo ſhalt thou obtain
A double meed, my favour and thy lord's.

LICHAS.

The duty of an herald it is mine
With firmneſs to diſcharge; nor e'er to thee
Will I be falſe; but, as it is, preſent
This cheſt, and faithfully relate thy words.

DEIANIRA.

Go then: the ſtate of my domeſtic charge
Thou know'ſt.

LICHAS.

I know it, Lady, and ſhall ſay
That all things by thy prudent care are ſafe.

DEIANIRA.

Thou know'ſt, for thou haſt ſeen, how I received
This ſtranger, with what friendly courteſy.

LICHAS.

I ſaw it, and my heart was rapt with joy.

DEIANIRA.

Is there aught elſe I wiſh thee to relate?

My

My love to him, I fear, thou may'ſt report,
Ere of his love to me I am aſſured.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

You, on the cliffs, whoſe jutting brow
O'erhangs the daſhing wave,
At whoſe ſoft foot the warm ſprings flow
The weary limbs to lave;
On Oeta's ſummits rudely piled
Who fix your habitations wild;
You, who the Melian bay command,
The golden-quiver'd Virgin's ſtrand,
Or near the rocky ſtraits reſide
Where Greece her Chiefs in council views with pride;

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Soon ſhall you hear the pipe's ſweet ſound;
To you it comes again;
No mournful notes it breathes around
But ſprightly is the ſtrain;
And, with ſuch airs as joy inſpire,
Rivals the Muſes' heav'nly lyre.
The winged hours the hero bring,
Son of Alcmena and heav'n's king;
He comes, he chaſes all our fears,
And the rich ſpoils of every virtue bears.

L. 717. The ſtraits of Thermopylæ, where the great Amphictyonic council met.

STROPHE

STROPHE 2.

The hero abſent from our ſtate
Twelve tedious moons we mourn,
Whilſt anxious Expectation ſate,
And watch'd his wiſh'd return,
Unknown what ſeas he ploughs with pain,
What ſhores his lingering ſteps detain.
Meanwhile his fond wife melts in tears,
And yields her heart a prey to fears:
But Mars now bids his fury ceaſe,
And cloſes his long day of toils in peace.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

May he arrive, e'en now arrive;
Nor let the lab'ring oar
Forbear his welcome bark to drive
On Trachin's ſhouting ſhore,
But bring him from the iſland ſhrine,
Where now he offers rites divine.
Yes, let him come with all the fire
Of eager love and fond deſire;
Come, as the Centaur's words profeſt,
Wrapt in Perſuaſion's medicated veſt!

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIANIRA.

I fear, my female friends, that I have done
More than became me in my late attempt.

CHORUS.

Daughter of royal Oeneus, what hath chanced?

DEIANIRA.

I know not; but miſgivings ſink my mind,
Leſt it ſhould ſoon appear that I have done,
Impell'd by honeſt hope, ſome mighty ill.

CHORUS.

Thy preſents to thy lord, cauſe they this fear?

DEIANIRA.

So ſtrongly, that I never will adviſe
A promptneſs to a deed of dark event.

CHORUS.

If we may know, inform us whence thy fear.

DEIANIRA.

A thing, my friends, hath happen'd far beyond
All thought, and big with wonder. You ſhall hear.
The ſoft wool ſever'd from the ſnow-white fleece,
With which I lately tinged the robe, at once
Waſted and, touch'd by none within the houſe,
Shrunk ſelf-corroded into duſt, and lay
A looſe heap on the ſurface of the ſtone.
That thou may'ſt know each circumſtance, diſtinct
Shall my relation be, and giv'n at large.
Whate'er the dying Centaur, 'midſt the pangs
Of the keen arrow in his ſide infix'd,
Gave me in charge, I treaſured in my heart,
As characters indelibly engraved

On

On brazen tablets: his inſtructions theſe,
And I obey'd them; from the blazing hearth,
And by the warm beams of the ſun untouch'd,
Cloſe-cover'd ſtill to keep this potent charm
Freſh, till occaſion ſhould require its uſe.
I did ſo: and when now my thought reſolved
To put its virtue to the proof, retired
In ſecret, wool from my domeſtic ſtores
I for the purpoſe took, and tinged the veſt;
Then folded it, and laid it, as you ſaw,
In a cloſe cheſt by the ſun's beams untouch'd.
Again returning I beheld a ſight
No language can expreſs, nor could the thought
Of man conceive; the wool, wherewith I tinged
The veſt, I chanced to throw where the ſun's rays
Beam'd in full force; as it grew warm, it ſhrunk
And waſted on the ground, like the light duſt
Which falls beneath the ſaw, like this it lay:
But ſoon the ſwelling maſs in froth aroſe,
Fermenting like the grape's rich juice, that drops
Pour'd in grey autumn on the earth. My mind
Is troubled, and perplex'd with fears: I ſee
That I have done ſome dreadful deed; for whence
This kindneſs by the dying Centaur ſhown,
Or why to me, through whom the ſavage died?
It is not ſo; but, wiſhing to deſtroy
The author of his wound, he filed his tongue
To ſooth my ear with glozing courteſy.

This I too late perceive, for now to know
Avails not: I alone, ah wretched me!
(If with falſe fears my ſoul is not deceived)
Have wrought his ruin: well I know the ſhaft
That gave the wound; e'en Chiron the divine
Fell by its fatal point; to every beaſt
Its touch is death; and the black poiſon, mix'd
With the vile Centaur's blood, ſhall now deſtroy
My lord too. Such my fears. But ſhould he die,
Fix'd is the purpoſe of my ſoul, with him
I too will die: for who could bear to live
With infamy, that has a ſenſe of ſhame,
And a baſe nature holds in high diſdain?

CHORUS.

Horror at dreadful deeds muſt ſeize the ſoul;
But ere th' event hope ſhould not be renounced.

DEIANIRA.

But in deſigns, which honour does not own,
There is no hope that harbours confidence.

CHORUS.

To thoſe who err in judgement, not in will,
Anger is gentle: Lady, ſuch be thine.

DEIANIRA.

The ſtranger to affliction thus may ſpeak;
But not the wretch who ſhares the dreadful ill.

CHORUS.

The time now calls for ſilence; on this theme

Unleſs

Unleſs thou wou'dſt hold converſe with thy ſon,
Who went to ſeek his father: he is here.

HYLLUS, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

HYLLUS.

My mother, oh that thou wert now no more;
Or, if alive, that to ſome other ſon
Thou wert a mother; or to holier thoughts
The preſent temper of thy mind were changed.

DEIANIRA.

What have I done that merits this rebuke?

HYLLUS.

Know then the dire event: this fatal day
Thy huſband and my father thou haſt ſlain.

DEIANIRA.

Ah wretched me! What haſt thou ſaid, my ſon?

HYLLUS.

What cannot be recall'd: the deed once done,
Where is the pow'r can render it not done?

DEIANIRA.

What may this mean, my ſon? By whom inform'd
Say'ſt thou that I have done this hateful deed?

HYLLUS.

I ſaw my father's ſufferings, with theſe eyes
I ſaw them, nor by others was inform'd.

DEIANIRA.

Where didſt thou ſee him? where attend him? ſay.

HYLLUS.

If thou wou'dſt know it, I muſt tell thee all.
The far-famed town of Eurytus deſtroy'd,
The trophies of his conqueſt, and the ſpoils
He to Cenæum brought, a rocky point
High-riſing on the Eubœan ſhore, and waſh'd
On each ſide by the ſea; his altars there,
And the green foliage of a grove, he raiſed
To Jove his father; there my longing eyes
With joy firſt ſaw him: but as he prepared
The various victims, hence his ſervant came,
The herald Lichas, and thy preſent brought,
The fatal veſt: with this, for ſuch thy charge,
He robed himſelf, and ſlew twelve beauteous bulls
Selected from the prey; but to the god
An hundred various victims he had brought.
At firſt th' unhappy hero, with a mind
Chearful and joying in his gorgeous robe,
Offer'd his vows; but when the bloody flame
Blazed from the hallow'd ſacrifice, and heat
Glow'd from the unctuous firs, cloſe to his ſides
And to each limb, as by ſome artiſt fix'd,
The robe adhered; and through his bones ſhot fierce
Convulſive pains; then as the poiſonous gore
Of the deteſted Hydra rankled deep,
He aſk'd th' unhappy Lichas, for thy crime

L. 845. This was uſual on ſolemn occaſions. Thus Virgil,
Spargite humum foliis, inducite fontibus umbras,
Paſtores: mandat fieri ſibi talia Daphnis.

In

In nothing blameable, by whoſe baſe arts
He brought this robe: unconſcious what he brought
Th' ill-fated herald ſaid, from thee alone
It was a preſent to his charge aſſign'd,
And brought as he received it. At theſe words,
Rack'd as he was with agonizing pains,
He ſeized him by the foot above the part
Where the joint bends, and daſh'd him 'gainſt the rock
Projecting o'er the waves that waſh its ſides;
A mingled maſs of hair, and brains, and blood
Flow'd from his ſhatter'd head; th' aſſembled crouds
Lament the hero's ſufferings, and the fate
Of Lichas; but of all the train not one
Had courage to approach him: to the ground
One while he bent convulſed; anon erect
He cried aloud; the promontories round,
The rocks of Locris, and Eubœa's heights
Reſounded with his cries: but now grown faint,
And oft with anguiſh writhing on the earth,
With many a groan he curſed thy nuptial bed,
Inhuman as thou art, to his repoſe
So fatal; curſed thy father's bridal rites,
Whence to his life this peſt. Then through the miſt,
That darken'd o'er him, his diſtorted eyes
He raiſed, and ſaw me 'midſt the numerous croud,
Weeping his fate; he look'd on me, and cried
My ſon, come to me; do not fly my ills,
Though with thy dying father thou ſhou'dſt die;

But

But bear me hence, and ſee thou lay me where
No mortal may behold me: if thy ſoul
Is ſenſible of pity, from this land
Remove me; haſte, that here I may not die.
Thus as he urged, we placed him in a bark,
And brought him to this ſhore, no eaſy taſk,
Roaring aloud through anguiſh; him thou ſoon
Or living wilt behold, or lately dead.
This 'gainſt my father have thy arts deviſed,
This haſt thou done, my mother; and this deed
May rigorous juſtice on thy head repay,
And the avenging Fury, if my pray'rs
Be righteous: they are righteous: thou haſt caſt
All that is righteous from thee, and haſt ſlain
The beſt, the nobleſt man the earth could boaſt:
His equal never more ſhalt thou behold.

CHORUS.

Without reply why doſt thou haſte away?
Silence, be thou aſſured, confirms the charge.

HYLLUS.

Nay, let her go; and may a favouring gale
Swell as ſhe goes, and waft her from my ſight.
Why ſhould I cheriſh with a ſon's fond pride
The name of mother? Nothing hath ſhe done
That ſhows a mother's part: let her then go,
And take this farewell with her, May ſhe find
Such joys as to my father ſhe hath given.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

See, virgins, ſee, the doom of old
By the prophetic voice foretold
Advances with impetuous ſpeed,
For thus the fates decreed,
"Twelve times the moon ſhall bend her ſilver bow,
"Then reſt from toils the ſon of Jove ſhall know."
See, th' event with ſecret force
Onward holds its deſtin'd courſe;
For he, who ſinks to Pluto's peaceful ſhore,
Is to toils a ſlave no more.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

For if the Centaur o'er his head
Guileful the ſanguine cloud has ſpread;
If from the venom-tinctured veſt
He feels the rankling peſt
Of death and of the ſpotted Hydra born,
How ſhall he ſee another orient morn?
Ours the hero to deplore
Waſted by the Hydra's gore,
As the rough Centaur's wiles their pangs impart,
Burning in his tortured heart.

STROPHE 2.

But as fear her love alarms,
When now the royal dame with dread
Beholds a rival to her nuptial bed,
Confiding in theſe fatal charms

She thoughtleſs is enſnared with hoſtile wiles,
Whilſt hope to win her lord her heart beguiles.
Now the ruin ſhe deplores,
Now the tear of anguiſh pours;
For fate advancing all the treachery ſhows,
Whence this mighty miſchief flows.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Forth hath burſt the fount of tears.
The peſt is ſpread. From all thy foes
Never on thee, Alcides, fell ſuch woes
To rouze dejected pity's fears.
Alas th' illuſtrious hero's fatal ſpear,
That flamed terrific in the front of war!
From Oechalia's ſummit hoar
This the captive virgin bore:
The deed declares Idalia's ſportive queen,
Acting ſilent and unſeen.

CHORUS.

Am I deceived? Or hear I from the houſe
The voice of lamentation newly raiſed?
It is the cry of grief diſtinct and clear:
Something beneath this roof burſts forth anew.
But mark this aged matron, what a gloom
Of more than uſual ſadneſs clouds her brow!
She comes, and will inform us what hath chanced.

MATRON,

MATRON, CHORUS.

MATRON.

Of no light ills, O virgins, hath the gift
Sent to Alcides been to us the cauſe.

CHORUS.

Say, aged matron, what new ill is this.

MATRON.

The laſt of ways is Deianira gone,
Not by the living trod.

CHORUS.

The way of death?

MATRON.

Thou haſt heard all.

CHORUS.

Alas th' unhappy queen,
Is ſhe then dead?

MATRON.

The truth again thou heareſt.

CHORUS.

Ah her untimely fate! Say how ſhe died.

MATRON.

Moſt wretched, by an harſh and rueful act.

CHORUS.

Tell us the manner.

MATRON.

She deſtroy'd her ſelf.

CHORUS.

By what diſeaſe, or what wild frenzy ſeized?

MATRON.

Pierced by the point of the relentleſs ſword.

CHORUS.

But how could ſhe deviſe, or how alone
Accompliſh on her ſelf the deathful deed?

MATRON.

By the deep piercing of the pitileſs ſteel.

CHORUS.

Did thy ſad eyes behold the deſperate deed?

MATRON.

I ſaw it all, for near her I was placed.

CHORUS.

How was it? how? inform us.

MATRON.

Her own hand
The dreadful act againſt her ſelf perform'd.

CHORUS.

This Nymph, this fatal ſtranger hath giv'n birth,
Birth to a Fury dreadful to this houſe.

MATRON.

Dreadful indeed! But more, hadſt thou been near,
Hadſt thou, as I, been preſent to behold
Her conduct, more thy pity had been moved.

CHORUS.

Such things how dared a woman's hand attempt?

MATRON.

It was a ſcene of horror: thou with me
Wilt thus atteſt, when thou ſhalt know the whole.
Soon as ſhe entering paſs'd the gates alone,
And ſaw her ſon preparing in the court
A cover'd couch with purpoſe to return
And meet his father, ſhe conceal'd her ſelf
Where none might ſee her; then ſhe wail'd aloud
Proſtrate before the altar, that her ſtate
Was become deſolate; and if ſhe touch'd
Aught which before her hands had uſed, ſhe wept.
Then through th' apartments as her wand'ring ſteps
She turn'd, ſome loved domeſtic if ſhe ſaw,
Affected at the ſight ſhe pour'd a flood
Of tears; her wretched ſtate ſhe then deplored,
And all the riches of her houſe, no more
With children to be bleſt. This had an end.
Then to the chamber, where the nuptial bed
Of Hercules was placed, with ſudden ſpeed
I ſaw her ruſh; conceal'd a ſecret eye
I kept on her, and there beheld her ſpread
With buſy care the coverings o'er the couch
Of Hercules; this done, ſhe ſprung aloft,
And ſeated on the middle of the bed
Gave the warm fount of tears to guſh, and ſaid,

O thou dear couch, long ſince my bridal bed,
Henceforth farewell; for never ſhalt thou more
Receive me on thy ſoft down to repoſe.
She ſpoke, and with diſpatchful hand unlooſed
The golden claſp, which o'er her ſwelling breaſts
Confined her robe; thus was her ſide laid bare,
And her left ſhoulder. With my utmoſt ſpeed
I ran to tell her ſon what ſhe deſign'd.
Short was the interval; yet when we came,
We ſaw her ſide deep wounded, to her heart
The ſword had pierced: at that ſad ſight her ſon
Groan'd in the anguiſh of his ſoul, for well
He knew that 'gainſt her ſelf enraged this deed
She had effected, taught too late what ill
She on her houſe had brought, without deſign,
But by the Centaur's evil arts enſnared.
Nor ſighs nor tears th' unhappy youth forbore,
Nor lamentations: to her cheek he join'd
His cheek, and to her bleeding ſide his ſide;
Thus lying near her many a groan he heaved,
That raſhly he had charged her with a crime
Of baſe intent; then wept, becauſe at once
Of hers and of his father's life deprived.
Such ſcenes I ſaw: ſo that if mortal man
Of one day, or of more ſhould make account,
His thoughts were vain; to morrow is not, ere
In ſafety he has paſs'd the preſent day.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Which moſt ſhall cauſe my tears to flow?
Which moſt ſhall I lament?
Each is a deed of equal woe,
And dreadful each event.
Beneath this roof may one be ſeen,
The other comes with threat'ning mein.
The preſent ill, th' impending dread,
Alike their gloomy horrors ſpread.
Oh, would ſome fav'ring whirlwind riſe,
Sweep from this houſe, and drive me through the air
From this dire ſcene of ſorrow far,
And from theſe miſeries ſpare my aching eyes!
Whilſt the ſon of Jove ſuſtains
Fierce and agonizing pains,
My trembling ſoul would ſicken with affright,
And I ſhould die at ſuch a ſight.
See, to this royal manſion near
Some prodigy of woe they bear:
No diſtant grief excites this mournful ſtrain,
Taught like the thrilling Nightingale's to flow.
In ſolemn ſilence moves the ſtranger train,
Heedful, as friends, with gentle ſteps and ſlow:
Nor word nor ſound he utters as he lies,
And death, or ſleep, hath cloſed the hero's eyes.

HERCULES WITH ATTENDANTS, HYLLUS, CHORUS.

HYLLUS.

What anguiſh, O my father, rends my heart

To

To see thee thus! What can I do? Ah me,
Unhappy me, what grief is mine!

ATTENDANT.

My son
Be silent, lest thou rouse his cruel pangs,
And torture him to madness; thus reposed
He lives; forbear then, and restrain thy cries.

HYLLUS.

Say'st thou he lives, old man?

ATTENDANT.

His sense thus lock'd
In sleep, thou wilt not rouse him, wilt not move,
Or stir the fury of his fierce disease.

HYLLUS.

His sufferings so immense distract my soul.

HERCULES.

Ah, to what region am I come? O Jove,
'Mongst whom of mortals am I laid, thus rack'd
With never-ceasing pains? Ah wretched me,
How fierce the gnawings of this fell disease!

ATTENDANT.

Happier had been thy silence: from his eyes
Thy clamours have dispell'd pain-soothing sleep.

HYLLUS.

How could I at a sight like this refrain?

HERCULES.

Ye hallow'd altars, whose firm base is fix'd

On

On high Cenæum, what a recompence
For all my victims to unhappy me
Have you repaid? O Jove, with what fierce pains
Haſt thou afflicted me? This dire diſeaſe,
Whoſe unextinguiſh'd rage to madneſs fires
My burſting veins, oh that I had not known!
What potent charm, what ſkill medicinal
Can mitigate, without the pow'r of Jove,
Theſe agonizing pangs? Oh might I ſee
This miracle, though diſtant! Let me lie,
Ah, let me lie repoſed. Why doſt thou touch,
Why doſt thou raiſe me up? Each touch is death.
Thou haſt awaken'd pangs that were at reſt.
Again my tortures are enflamed, again
They ruſh upon me. Ah, where are you now,
Ye moſt unjuſt of all the Grecian race?
With many toils th' infeſted ſeas I clear'd,
And all the ruffian-haunted woods; yet now
I miſerably periſh; not a man
Will bring or fire or ſword to put an end
To my afflictions; not a man will come
Willing to rend from me this hated life.

ATTENDANT.

O thou his ſon, this taſk requires a ſtrength
Greater than mine; aſſiſt him thou, thine eye
Quicker than mine ſees what may give him aid.

HYLLUS.

I touch him, but to mitigate his pains.

Exceeds

Exceeds my pow'r, and all the healing art
Avails not: that muſt be the work of Jove.

HERCULES.

My ſon, my ſon, where art thou? In thy arms
Raiſe me, ſupport me. O my cruel fate!
This fierce, immedicable, waſting peſt
Attacks, again attacks me; wretched me!
O Pallas, it conſumes me. O my ſon,
In pity to thy father draw thy ſword,
And plunge it deep into my throat; the deed
Will not be impious: heal theſe torturing pangs
Inflicted by thy mother's wicked hands.
Oh might I ſee her fall'n, thus fall'n, as me
Her arts have ſunk! Thou monarch of the dead,
Brother of Jove, give me a ſpeedy death,
And lay, oh lay a tortured wretch at reſt!

CHORUS.

My friends, chill horror ſhakes me as I hear
The miſeries, which th' illuſtrious hero bears.

HERCULES.

What firey and unutterable pains
With rankling venom pierce my hands, my back!
Such not the wife of Jove to me aſſign'd,
Nor ſtern Euryſtheus, as this treacherous dame,
Daughter of Oeneus, whoſe entangling net,
The texture of the furies, burns my limbs,
And works me death; cloſe to my ſides it ſticks,
Eats through my ſkin, and rioting beneath

My vitals drains; already hath it drank
The freſh ſtreams of my blood, and all my fleſh
Is waſted, by theſe gnawing bands conſumed.
This not the ſpear on the enſanguined plain
Uplifted, nor the terrible array
Of earth-born giants, nor the furious force
Of ſavage beaſts rouſed from their horrid dens,
Nor Grecian, nor Barbarian, nor the rage
Of ruffian bands from which I purged the earth,
Effected; but a ſingle woman, form'd
By nature weak, a woman to the ground
Without a ſword hath brought me. But, my ſon,
Now prove thy ſelf my ſon, nor more revere
A mother's name; but bring her from the houſe,
And give her to my hands, that I may know
If more my wretched ſtate afflicts thy heart
Than hers, when thou ſhalt ſee her ruin'd form
Defaced by my juſt vengeance. Go, my ſon,
Dare this; have pity on me; many feel
The touch of pity for me, as I weep
Like a ſick girl lamenting: till this hour
No man can ſay that e'er his eyes beheld
Such weakneſs in me; but without a groan
Toils and afflictions always I ſuſtain'd:
But now my firmneſs ſinks, and I am found
Amidſt my ills a woman. But, my ſon,
Come to me, nearer ſtand, come all, obſerve
From what a malady theſe torturing pains

I ſuffer; look, I throw my veſts aſide,
Behold this wretched body; what a ſight
To move your pity! Ah, this burning ſpaſm
Rends me afreſh, it pierces through my ſides;
No reſt this cruel, gnawing peſt allows.
Receive me, O thou monarch of the dead!
Strike me, ye bolts of Jove; O king ſupreme,
Roll thy red thunders, hurl them on this head,
My father! for it riots now again,
Gains ſtrength, grows fiercer. O my hands, my hands,
My back, my breaſt, my arms! Are theſe the nerves
In which I gloried once, whoſe matchleſs ſtrength
Quell'd the Nemæan lion with the blood
Of ſlaughter'd herds diſtain'd, whoſe ſavage rage
None dared approach? Are theſe the nerves, whoſe might
Cruſh'd the Lernæan Hydra, and ſubdued
The hoſt of monſters to the horſe's ſtrength
Joining the human form, a lawleſs band,
To outrage train'd, exulting in brute force?
The Boar of Erymanthus; the grim Dog
Of hell, three-headed monſter, by no arms
To be attack'd, from dire Echidna ſprung;
The Dragon, guardian of the golden fruit
On earth's remoteſt verge? Theſe glorious toils,
Theſe, and a thouſand more have I atchieved;
But never mortal o'er my glory raiſed
A trophy: nerveleſs now this hardy frame
Is ſhatter'd, and beneath this blind diſeaſe

I waſte

I waſte away; my mother's virtuous name
Avails me not, nor through the ſtarry ſkies
That I am call'd the ſon of thundering Jove.
Yet know you this, though I am nothing now,
A weak exhauſted nothing, yet e'en thus
I will inflict juſt vengeance on her head
Who brought me to this ſtate; that ſhe may learn,
And publiſh to the world, that it is mine
In life or death to puniſh impious deeds.

CHORUS.

Unhappy Greece, what ſorrows will be thine,
Of his illuſtrious virtues if bereaved?

HYLLUS.

With leave obtain'd ſince I may ſpeak to thee,
Hear me with patient ſilence, though in pain;
For I ſhall aſk what juſtice wills thou grant.
Give me thy ſelf, with paſſion leſs enflamed;
For thus thou canſt not know that thy warm wiſh
Obtain'd would yield thee aught of ſolid joy,
Or that thy rage without a cauſe is roufed.

HERCULES.

Speak what thou wou'dſt, but briefly; 'midſt theſe pains
I comprehend not hints abſtruſe and dark.

HYLLUS.

Much of my mother, of her preſent ſtate,
And her unweeting error I would ſpeak.

HERCULES.

O thou moſt baſe! And canſt thou to my ears
The murderer of thy father name again?

HYLLUS.

Such is her ſtate, that ſilence in her cauſe
Would ill become me.

HERCULES.

All her former faults
Might well admit thy plea.

HYLLUS.

So wilt thou judge
Of this day's error.

HERCULES.

Speak, but take good heed
No baſeneſs ſtain thy nature.

HYLLUS.

She is dead,
Recently ſlain.

HERCULES.

By whom? Through ills announced
Portentous are thy words.

HYLLUS.

Againſt her life
Her own bold hand ſhe arm'd.

HERCULES.

Oh that from mine
She had received her meed!

HYLLUS.

The whole truth known,
Soon would thine anger die away.

HERCULES.

Thy words
To ſomething dreadful are a proeme: ſay
Why ſuch thy thought.

HYLLUS.

Unweetingly ſhe err'd,
Her whole intent was good.

HERCULES.

Art thou ſo baſe?
Murdering thy father well did ſhe intend?

HYLLUS.

When thy new bride within thy houſe ſhe ſaw,
Weening by charms to win thy love, ſhe err'd.

HERCULES.

Whom in theſe arts ſo ſkill'd doth Trachin boaſt?

HYLLUS.

The Centaur Neſſus with his dying breath
Beguiled her with ſuch charm t' enflame thy love.

HERCULES.

Then I am loſt indeed; unhappy fate!
I periſh, ah, I periſh! Now no more
Beams the ſun's golden light for me; I know
My miſerable ſtate. But go, my ſon,
(Thou haſt no more a father) hither bring

Thy

Thy brothers, bring them all; and with thee lead
The ſorrowing Alcmena, wife of Jove
In vain; that from my lips you yet may hear
The laſt of Oracles to me announced.

HYLLUS.

Thy mother is not here, but on the banks
Of Tiryns hath her dwelling; of thy ſons
Some there ſhe trains, and ſome at Thebes reſide:
We, who are near, if aught thou wou'dſt require,
Hearing thy mandates will perform the charge.

HERCULES.

Then hear thou me; for now thou art arrived
At ſuch an age as to the world may ſhow
The virtues of the man, and of my ſon.
To me long ſince my aweful ſire declared
That by no living mortal I ſhould die,
But by the dead, in the dark realms below
By one that hath his manſion: this is he,
The Centaur Neſſus, by the voice divine
Foretold; though long ſince dead, me of my life
He hath bereaved. Attend, while yet I ſpeak
Of oracles late utter'd, which accord
With thoſe of former times: When I had reach'd
The foreſt of the Selli, (an hard race

L. 1242. Electryon, the father of Alcmena, was king of Tiryns.

L. 1258. Homer ſpeaks of theſe prieſts in an addreſs to Jupiter as preſiding on Dodona's vocal hill,

Whoſe groves the Selli, race auſtere! ſurround,
Their feet unwaſh'd, their ſlumbers on the ground;
Who hear, from ruſtling oaks thy dark decrees,
And catch the fates low-whiſper'd in the breeze.
Pope. Iliad xvi. 288.

That

That o'er the mountains roam at large, and reſt
Couch'd on the ground) theſe from the vocal oak
Of Jove I wrote; and thus its voice announced,
That when the hours ſhould bring this time to life,
All my impending toils ſhould find an end.
I fondly thought of life and happy days,
Whilſt it denoted nothing but my death;
For the dead reſt ſecure from toils. Theſe truths
Are clear, my ſon; behoves thee then to aid
Thy father, nor provoke my harſh rebukes;
Act of thine own accord, and this great law,
Obedience to a father's will, obſerve.

HYLLUS.

I tremble at the words thy mournful ſtate
Declaring; but thy will ſhall be obey'd.

HERCULES.

Firſt give me thy right hand.

HYLLUS.

This pledge of faith
Why thus demanded?

HERCULES.

Wilt thou give it ſtrait,
And not oppoſe my will?

HYLLUS.

I ſtretch it, ſee;
Nothing ſhall be refuſed.

HERCULES.

HERCULES.

Now by the head
Of Jove my father ſwear.

HYLLUS.

To do what deed?
Speak, and receive my faith.

HERCULES.

Swear to perform
What I command.

HYLLUS.

I ſwear: be witneſs, Jove!

HERCULES.

If thou art falſe, call vengeance on thy head.

HYLLUS.

I fear not vengeance, I will do the deed;
Yet be the aweful imprecation made.

HERCULES.

Know'ſt thou the higheſt point of Oeta's mount
Sacred to Jove?

HYLLUS.

I know it well, for oft
The victim have I offer'd on that mount.

HERCULES.

Thither this body it behoves thee now
With thine own hands to bear, and with ſuch friends
As thou ſhalt need; there raiſe an ample pile,

Much

Much from the deeply-rooted oak, and much
From the wild olive hewn; and on it place
This body; waving then the blazing torch,
Set it on fire; and let no mark of grief
Attend the deed; but, if thou art my ſon,
Do it without a groan, without a tear;
Elſe ſhall my curſe amidſt the realms beneath
Await thee, and hang heavy on thy heart.

HYLLUS.

Ah me, my father, what haſt thou enjoin'd!

HERCULES.

What muſt be done: if not, ſome other deem
Thy father, and be call'd my ſon no more.

HYLLUS.

To what a deed wou'dſt thou excite thy ſon,
To kill my father with a murderer's hand!

HERCULES.

Not ſo: thy lenient hand I only aſk
To heal the anguiſh of my dreadful ills.

HYLLUS.

How by theſe flames thy body can I heal?

HERCULES.

If thy ſoul ſhrink from this, perform the reſt.

HYLLUS.

Theſe arms ſhall bear thee, faithful to the taſk.

HERCULES.

And wilt thou raiſe, as charged, the ample pile?

HYLLUS.

So that my hands are guiltleſs of its flames,
And of thy death, thy charge I will obey.

HERCULES.

With this I will be ſatisfied: yet more
One grace, a ſmall one, to the greater add.

HYLLUS.

Great though it be, it ſhall not be refuſed.

HERCULES.

The virgin daughter of Oechalia's king
Thou knoweſt?

HYLLUS.

Iole, if juſt my thought.

HERCULES.

Moſt juſt. This charge I give thee, Her, my ſon,
When I am dead (ſince thou haſt ſhown a will
Prompt to be pious) mindful of thine oath
Eſpouſe; and let no man, thy ſelf except,
Her, for my bed deſign'd, preſume to touch;
But give her thy fond love, my ſon; indulge
Thy father's wiſh: this ſlight requeſt refuſed,
Things of high import granted loſe their grace.

L. 1319. Unleſs the participle κλιθῆσαι be taken in this ſenſe, the requeſt of Hercules muſt be very abſurd, and even impious. He had before ſpoken of Iole as a virgin, τὴν Εὐρυτίαν παρθένον; Hyllus objects to her as the fatal cauſe of his mother's death and his father's miſeries. This Hercules would not hear. Hyllus then with great delicacy hints at his father's too intimate connexion with her, on which account his own marriage with her would be impious; Hercules calls the gods to witneſs that it would not be a deed of impiety, but of juſtice; on which Hyllus immediately conſents.

HYLLUS.

Anger, in pity of his pains, ſubſides;
But ſuch a wayward fancy who can bear?

HERCULES.

Thou wilt not then with my requeſt comply.

HYLLUS.

Her, of my mother's death that was alone
The guilty cauſe, that brought thee to this ſtate,
Her, by the vengeful furies if not urged,
Who would receive? No; rather let me die,
Than dwell with thoſe whom moſt my ſoul abhors.

HERCULES.

This youth, it ſeems, a dying father's charge
Reveres not; but a curſe ſhall from the gods
Await thy diſobedience to my will.

HYLLUS.

Ah, to thy body not confined, I fear,
Thy reaſon ſoon this malady will reach.

HERCULES.

And thou the cauſe; for thou again doſt rouſe
My ſleeping pains.

HYLLUS.

Unhappy me, what doubts
Diſtract my ſoul!

HERCULES.

Thy ſoul averſe diſdains
A father's mandates.

HYLLUS.

Shall I then be taught
To do an impious deed?

HERCULES.

If it delights
My heart, not impious is the deed.

HYLLUS.

Thy ſon
Doſt thou with juſtice to this deed impell?

HERCULES.

I call the gods to witneſs, it is juſt.

HYLLUS.

Then I will do it, nor oppoſe thy will,
Appealing to the gods that in good truth
This is thy work: nor ſhall I e'er be deem'd
Impious, a father's charge whilſt I obey.

HERCULES.

Thou haſt concluded well: and now, my ſon,
To all thy former add one ſpeedy grace;
Ere fierce convulſions ſeize me, or the whirl
Of madneſs, lay me on the pyre. Come then,
This toil refuſe not, raiſe me, bear me hence;
This is my reſt from ills, this my laſt end.

HYLLUS.

Nothing reſtrains us from this act, thus urged
By thy command, my father, thus compell'd.

HERCULES.

Now my firm ſoul, ere this diſeaſe return
To torture me, with ſteel, with adamant
Cloſe up my lips, let not a cry break forth,
For this unpleaſing work now gives me joy.

HYLLUS.

You, who attend, take up your lord: my part
In this ſad buſineſs juſtly claims excuſe.
But in this horrible event the gods,
Who gave him being, and are fathers call'd,
Yet unconcern'd ſuch ſufferings can behold,
Show that their minds are ruthleſs. Mortal man
Sees not the future: we the preſent feel,
Mournful to us, diſgraceful to the gods,
But moſt ſevere to him who bears theſe ills.

SEMICHORUS.

Virgin, go hence: thou haſt beheld the deaths
Of the illuſtrious, and their recent woes;
Dreadful events, but all ordain'd by Jove.



HERCULES.

Now my firm foot, ere this dilatic return
To torture me, with steel, with adamant
Clole up my lips, let not a cry break forth,
For this unpleasing work now gives me joy.

HYLLUS.

You, who attend, take up your lord: my part
In this fad burthen justly claims excuse.
But in this horrible event the gods,
Who gave him being, and are fathers call'd,
Yet unconcern'd such sufferings can behold,
Show that their minds are ruthless. Mortal man
Seeks not the future: we the present feel,
Mournful to us, disgraceful to the gods,
But most severe to him who bears their ills.

SEMICHORUS.

Virgin, go hence: thou hast beheld the deaths
Of the illustrious, and their recent woes;
Dreadful events, but all ordain'd by Jove.

A J A X.

Χ Λ Ι Λ

AJAX.

THE conteſt for the arms of Achilles, the deciſion in favour of Ulyſſes, the indignation, madneſs, and death of Ajax, are circumſtances well known: on theſe Sophocles formed the tragedy now before the reader; it has ever been eſteemed as one of his greateſt works: it is ſo.

The firſt ſcene may be conſidered as a prologue. The part which Minerva is made to act in it is, under every light in which it may be viewed, groſsly abſurd; it is more worthy of Lucian and his Momus, than of Sophocles and the Goddeſs of Wiſdom. But ſuch repreſentations of the gods ſhow us how miſerably the human mind was darkened amidſt the boaſted light of nature and reaſon. We forgive the poet however for the ſake of the fine reflection made by Ulyſſes at the ſight of Ajax in his frenzy, and for the humble piety which Minerva inculcates: this indeed is to the purpoſe, as a contemptuous diſregard of the gods was the crime for which Ajax was puniſhed.

The ſubject in itſelf is all fierceneſs and horror: this the poet has ſoftened by introducing the mild but unfortunate Tecmeſſa. Her firſt appearance is intereſting; her narrative preſerves a ſober decorum on a ſubject of the greateſt importance to her, and to the Salaminian ſailors, but totally void of dignity and grace. She ſhows the moſt amiable gentleneſs to

her loved and honoured lord. When ſhe endeavours to diſſuade him from his dreadful purpoſe, her arguments are dictated by reaſon and affection, yet they are warm and empaſſioned, and enforced with all the enthuſiaſm of eloquent grief. Her lamentations over his body, after he has fallen upon his ſword, are the genuine effuſions of a tender and afflicted heart: the miſeries of her own ſituation, and of her ſon's, riſe before her in all their horrors; but ſhe ſoon loſes ſight of them, and dwells with mournful fondneſs on the virtues of the dead; her grief is ſevere, but modeſt, affectionate, and pathetic.

In Ajax, after he had recovered his ſenſes, we find a ſullen melancholy, conſciouſneſs of his own worth, implacable reſentment, ſhame, deſperation, and an inflexible reſolution not to ſurvive his loſt glory: every part is animated, noble, and grand; but it is a terrible grandeur. His pretended change of this reſolution, neceſſary for the accompliſhment of his purpoſe, muſt have a fine effect in the repreſentation; it gives his friends hope, and diffuſes a calm over their minds; but it is the deceitful calm previous to a ſtorm, which ſoon burſts upon them with deſtructive violence.

With the death of Ajax, according to modern ideas, the drama ſhould end; but the injuries offered to him, and the afflictions of his friends had not yet an end. We know that to be deprived of the rites of ſepulture was to the antients more terrible than death itſelf; this occaſions a further and a deeper diſtreſs. We may be aſſured that the political enmity of the Athenians to the Spartans and Argives was the cauſe

of

of this odious repreſentation of Menelaus and Agamemnon; it had this happy effect, it gave the poet an opportunity of introducing the affectionate and high-ſpirited Teucer, and of enriching the drama with an animated conteſt, which muſt have produced the moſt fatal events, had it not been happily appeaſed by the generous prudence of Ulyſſes.

The ſcene is before the tent of Ajax, the laſt in ſtation; ſo that it has the camp and fleet of the Grecians ſtretching along the ſhore to the weſt, a valley terminated by mount Ida lying to the eaſt. The ſimplicity of the antient drama generally confined the whole repreſentation to one place, from which the Chorus was not allowed to depart. Sophocles has here ventured to vary the ſcene, and to diſperſe the Chorus, whom he brings together again in a wood at the foot of Ida, where Ajax had fallen upon his ſword. The reader of taſte will riſe, with the poet, ſuperior to the rules of criticiſm, and acknowlege that even the ſingle ſpeech of Ajax over his ſword is of more value than all the Unities.

Perſons of the Drama.

MINERVA.

ULYSSES.

AJAX.

TECMESSA.

TEUCER.

MENELAUS.

AGAMEMNON.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS OF SALAMINIAN SAILORS.

AJAX.

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

MINERVA.

SON of Laertes, oft have I obſerved
Thy watchful promptneſs 'gainſt the foe to ſeize
Each fit occaſion; and I ſee thee now
Ranging long time around the naval tent
Of Ajax, laſt in ſtation; thy keen eye
Marking the freſh impreſſion of his ſteps,
That thou may'ſt know if in the tent he reſts.
Well haſt thou traced him, like the Spartan hound
Of ſcent ſagacious: in the tent he reſts,

L. 5. This is from Homer, Iliad xi. v. 7. It was the poſt of danger and of honour, therefore aſſigned to Achilles and Ajax, in whoſe ſuperior ſtrength and valour the Grecian army confided.

L. 8. Æſchylus has given the ſame image, and uſed the ſame word,

This ſtranger ſeems, like the nice-ſcented hound,
Quick in the trace of blood, which ſhe will find.
Agamemn. v. 1102.

Sweat

Sweat from his temples ſtreaming, and his hands
With ſlaughter ſtain'd; to caſt thy ſearching eye
Within theſe gates is needleſs; but declare
The cauſe productive of this anxious toil,
That by my knowlege thou may'ſt be inform'd.

ULYSSES.

Ye accents of Minerva, of the gods
Moſt friendly to me! Well, O queen, I know
Thy voice, though thou not ſeen; it ſtrikes my ſenſe
Clear as the Tuſcan trumpet's braſs-tuned notes.
Juſt is thy knowlege that my circling ſtep
Traces a foe, Ajax, whoſe arm ſuſtains
The broad circumference of the maſſy ſhield;
Him, and none other, long time have I traced.
This night againſt us he hath done a deed
Which reaſon ſtarts at, if the deed be his,
For we know nothing certain, but are loſt
In doubt: mine therefore is it to ſuſtain
This voluntary toil; for all our herds,
Prize of our arms, the herdſmen too we find
Freſh ſlaughter'd by ſome waſting hand; to him
The general voice this odious deed imputes:
And one, who, as he walk'd the nightly round,
Deſcried him bounding o'er the fields alone,
The blood freſh dropping from his ſword, to me
Diſcloſed it: inſtant on his ſteps I preſs
Tracing their marks, now certain, now perplex'd.
But opportune thy coming; for thy hand

Hath been in all my actions paſt, in all
Of future enterprize ſhall be my guide.

MINERVA.

I know it well; and friendly to thy ſearch
Attended thee a guardian on thy way.

ULYSSES.

Say then, propitious goddeſs, have my toils
Juſt cauſe?

MINERVA.

They have: thoſe deeds were his.

ULYSSES.

What urged
His frentic hand?

MINERVA.

Rage, for the glorious arms
Which once Achilles bore.

ULYSSES.

Why on our herds
Fell then his wild aſſault?

MINERVA.

He deem'd his hand
Stain'd with your blood.

ULYSSES.

Was the aſſault deſign'd
Againſt the Grecians?

MINERVA.

He had work'd his will,
Had not my care been watchful.

ULYSSES.

ULYSSES.

With what bold
And daring thought?

MINERVA.

With guile by night alone
He ruſh'd upon you.

ULYSSES.

Far as he deſign'd
Advanced he?

MINERVA.

To the two imperial tents.

ULYSSES.

What then reſtrain'd his hand athirſt for blood?

MINERVA.

I check'd him from the ſavage joy his heart
Conceived, preſenting to his eyes wild forms
Of ſick imagination; on the herds
I turn'd him, and the undivided ſpoils
By herdſmen watch'd; on theſe he ruſh'd, and ſpread
Wide ſlaughter 'midſt the horned droves, around
Whirling his ſword; th' Atridæ now he ween'd
Fell by his hand, and now ſome other Chief,
Each after each; his mind with frenzy ſeized,
I urged him on, and drove him into toils
Thus wretchedly entangled. When his hand
From this wild ſlaughter ceaſed, the herds not ſlain
And all the flocks he ſeized, in fetters bound,
And drove them to his tent, deeming them men,

Not

Not horned herds: there now with many a laſh
He makes his captives feel his frentic rage.
But I will ſhow thee his diſtemperature,
To all the Grecians that thou may'ſt report
What thou haſt ſeen. Call up thy firmneſs, ſtay,
Of ill not apprehenſive; I will turn
His eyes aſide to caſt no glance on thee.
Ho there! To thee, who on thy captives' hands
Art fixing chains, to thee I call; come forth;
Ajax I call, come forth before the tent.

ULYSSES.

What doſt thou, goddeſs? What is thy intent?
Call him not forth.

MINERVA.

Stand ſilent; do not fear.

ULYSSES.

Nay by the gods! Suffice it he remains
Within the tent.

MINERVA.

Why ſhould he not come forth?
Was not the man before——

ULYSSES.

To me a foe;
And ſuch he is e'en now.

MINERVA.

Is there a joy
More grateful to the ſoul, than to deride
Our enemies?

ULYSSES.

Enough for me, O queen,
That he remains within.

MINERVA.

Doſt thou then fear
To ſee a madman?

ULYSSES.

Were his ſenſes ſound,
I ſhould not fear him.

MINERVA.

Thee, though preſent, now
He ſhall not ſee.

ULYSSES.

How not, ſince with his eyes
He ſees as uſual?

MINERVA.

I will cloud his ſight.

ULYSSES.

All may be done which the immortal gods
Deſign.

MINERVA.

Stand ſilent; where thou art, remain.

ULYSSES.

I ſhall, though hence more willing to retire.

MINERVA.

Ho, Ajax, ho! to thee again I call.
To thy aſſociate why no more reſpect?

MINERVA,

MINERVA, ULYSSES, AJAX.

AJAX.

Minerva, hail! Hail, progeny of Jove!
How opportune thy aid! With golden ſpoils
Thee for this glorious capture will I crown.

MINERVA.

Thy promiſe I approve. But tell me this,
Well haſt thou tinged thy ſword with Argive blood?

AJAX.

I have much cauſe to glory; nor the deed
Will I deny.

MINERVA.

And haſt thou raiſed the ſpear
Againſt th' Atridæ?

AJAX.

Never ſhall they more
Diſhonour Ajax.

MINERVA.

They are dead then; ſo
Thy words import, if I conceive them right.

AJAX.

Both dead: now let them take my arms away.

MINERVA.

Well: but that other from Laertes ſprung,
What fate is his? Hath he eſcaped thy hand?

AJAX.

Where that accurſt inveigler doſt thou aſk?

MINERVA.

I of thy rival, of Ulyſſes ſpeak.

AJAX.

With joy I hold him, goddeſs, in my tent
In chains: I would not that he yet ſhould die.

MINERVA.

What wou'dſt thou do? What more wou'dſt thou obtain?

AJAX.

Bound to the pillar which ſupports my tent——

MINERVA.

What further vengeance would thy rage aſſign?

AJAX.

His back the ſcourge ſhall gore; then let him die.

MINERVA.

Nay, thus ſeverely torture not the wretch.

AJAX.

In all beſides I yield me to thy will;
This vengeance, and none other, he ſhall feel.

MINERVA.

Since to do this is pleaſing to thee, uſe
Thy hand, and nothing of thy purpoſe ſpare.

AJAX.

I go to do it; but entreat this grace,
Always, as now, my firm aſſociate ſtand.

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

MINERVA.

Thou ſeeſt, Ulyſſes, what the pow'r of gods.

Who

Who was of thought more prudent than this man?
Who, when occaſion call'd, in act more brave?

ULYSSES.

I know not any; and I pity him,
Since now unhappy, though to me a foe,
For in the chain of ruin he is bound.
And this reſpects his ſtate not more than mine.
For all that live, I ſee, are nothing more
Than phantoms form'd of air, and ſhadows light.

MINERVA.

Haſt thou a ſenſe of this? Againſt the gods
Utter no vaunt profane; nor ſwell with pride,
More puiſſant if thy hand, or thy wealth riſe
In ampler ſtores. All human things a day
In darkneſs ſinks, a day to light reſtores.
The gods too love the ſober, modeſt mind,
The arrogant and impious they abhor.

CHORUS.

O ſon of Telamon, whoſe ample ſway
Deep-rooted in the ſea, that rolls around,
The ſtrong baſed ſhores of Salamis obey,
When with ſucceſs and glory thou art crown'd
My heart beats high with joy: but when the hand
Of angry Jove afflicts thee, or thy fame
Greece taints with envious and malignant blame,
I fear, I tremble like the fluttering dove.
Such terrors now around us blackening ſtand:

For

For ſlander ſays that o'er the paſtured plain
By thee this night the flocks, the herds were ſlain,
Spoils of the ravaged vales, (O deed abhor'd!)
Slain by thy flaming ſword.
Such tales Ulyſſes with inſidious art
Againſt thee forms, and whiſpers in each ear;
His ſpecious fictions all believe who hear,
Feeling more joy than chears th' inventor's heart,
And with malicious inſults mocks thy woes.
Who wings his ſhafts againſt the great and high,
Unerring to the mark beholds them fly:
'Gainſt me their aim they loſe.
Envy crawls on, the potent keen to wound;
Yet, when the hour brings danger forth, the low
Without them are a tottering bulwark found;
Theſe in the great their ſtrong protectors know,
The great by theſe protected firmly ſtand.
But to th' inſenſate wiſdom ſpeaks in vain:
Such this tumultuous train,
And to repell their inſults weak our hand,
Weak without thee: for now, eſcaped thy ſight,
Like flocks of birds they ſcream, and vex the ear:
Wou'dſt thou, O king, appear,
With awe they view the lordly vultur's flight,
And all their clamorous cries are huſh'd through fear.

Thee hath the Virgin Huntreſs ſprung from Jove,
Whoſe altars o'er the Scythian Taurus flame,
(O wild report, thou parent of our ſhame!)
Urged 'mongſt the herds with ſlaughtering rage to rove,
To her no honours for ſome conqueſt paid?
Didſt thou the glorious ſpoils of war detain?
Were her loved hinds beneath thy arrows ſlain,
As fearleſs o'er ſome hallow'd vale they ſtray'd?
Did the ſtern god, that in th' enſanguin'd field
Lifts high his blazing ſhield,
In vengeance ſend, defrauded of his right,
The frenzy of the night?

For never, did thy ſenſe its ſeat maintain,
O ſon of Telamon, with rage poſſeſt
Wou'dſt thou ſpread carnage o'er the paſtured plain.
Heav'n-ſent this wild diſeaſe hath fired thy breaſt.
O Phœbus, and thou ruler of the ſky,
Avert this ill report! To blaſt thy fame
If the great kings, and chiefs of mighty name,
In ſecret baſely forge this calumny,
Or he of the accurſt Siſyphian race,
Yield not to the diſgrace;
Nor, thine eye fix'd within thy naval tent,
The vile report augment.

Riſe,

Riſe, king of Salamis, aſſert thy fame;
Why to thy ſeat thus fix'd? Thy long delay
Adds to this heav'n-ſent miſchief fiercer flame.
For uncontroul'd the inſults of thy foes,
Like fires expoſed to winds, now force their way.
No bounds the ſpreading ſlander knows;
From tongue to tongue the taunts, the mockings roll;
And anguiſh rends my ſoul.

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TECMESSA.

Ye faithful train, that o'er the billows ſteer
The bark of Ajax, from Erectheus ſprung
A generous race, with ſorrow pierced we groan,
Who in a foreign land with zeal attend
The houſe of Telamon: for now the great,
The ſtrong, the daring Ajax ſinks beneath
The turbid ſtorm of a diſtemper'd mind.

CHORUS.

What weight of ſorrow hath this night produced
Changing the fortune of the former day,
Daughter of Phrygian Teuthras, tell thy friends;
For ſince his ſpear atchieved thee as his prize,
The ardent Ajax gave thee all his love;
Thou then, as one not ill inform'd, canſt ſpeak.

TECMESSA.

How can I ſpeak unutterable ills?
This will fall on thee with a weight like death;

Such thou wilt feel it: for with frenzy ſeized
This night th' illuſtrious Chief hath done a deed
Deſtructive to his fame: within the tent
Thou may'ſt behold the victims of his ſword
Weltering in gore, and ſlaughter'd by his hand.

CHORUS.

What haſt thou ſaid of one, that in the works
Of war flamed foremoſt! We can neither bear
The infamy, nor ſhun it. By the Chiefs
Already it is whiſper'd, and anon
Wide through the Grecian camp it will be ſpread.
Ah me! I fear th' advancing ill; the man
By the ſame hand, by frenzy arm'd, will die,
Amidſt the darkneſs of the night which whirl'd
His ſword, and with the herdſmen ſlew the herds.

TECMESSA.

Ah, what a grief! Thence, thence he came, and led
The herds as captives; ſome within the tent
He ſlew, and on the ground ſome mangled lie.
Two rams of ſnow-white fleece he ſeized; from one
He rent away the tongue, ſmote off the head,
And threw it from him; to a pillar high
The other bound, then ſnatch'd his chariot-reins,
And ſcourges it with many a ſounding ſtroke,
Reviling it with loud and ſhameful taunts,
The dictates of ſome Fury, not of man.

CHORUS.

Time is it then we veil our heads, and ſteal

With ſecret foot away; or mount our ſeats,
Ply the ſtrong oar, and to the ocean give
Our lightly-bounding bark. Such threats ſevere
The ſons of Atreus, who command our hoſt,
Denounce againſt us! cruſh'd with ſtones, I fear,
We too ſhall feel their vengeance, with our lord
Now ſtruggling in the bonds of ruthleſs fate.

TECMESSA.

Not ſtruggling now, for, as the boiſterous South
That roſe without the lightening's flaſhing fires,
His rage ſubſides. But to his ſenſe return'd
A new affliction grieves him; for to view
Ills all our own, where no aſſociate ſhares
The deed, with keeneſt anguiſh racks the heart.

CHORUS.

But we are happy if his ſenſe returns;
The ill now ceaſed, leſs anxious are our fears.

TECMESSA.

Hadſt thou thy choice, wou'dſt thou with grief afflict
Thy friends, that unſhared pleaſure might be thine;
Or bear in mutual grief a mutual part?

CHORUS.

The double, lady, is the greater ill.

TECMESSA.

We, the diſeaſe not ſharing, feel its pains.

L. 252. The Scholiaſt informs us that thoſe, who are acquainted with the nature of the winds, have obſerved that when the South riſes not attended with lightening, its violence ſoon ceaſes.

CHORUS.

Why this? I know not what thy words import.

TECMESSA.

When his diſeaſe raged higheſt, in the ills,
Which round encompaſs'd him, he felt a joy,
To us, whoſe ſenſe was perfect, cauſing grief.
Now he is calm, and from his wild diſeaſe
Breathes free, with anguiſh all his ſoul is rack'd,
Nor leſs is our affliction than before.
From ſingle is not this a double ill?

CHORUS.

To thee my heart aſſents; and much I fear
Some fatal ſtroke impending from a god:
Elſe why, his mind now calm, no more of joy
Feels he, than 'midſt the ſtorm of his diſeaſe?

TECMESSA.

Be thou aſſured that things have reach'd this height.

CHORUS.

But tell us how this ſudden ill began;
For we too melt in ſympathy of woe.

TECMESSA.

Thou ſhalt know all, as one that ſhares the grief.
The night was far advanced, the evening lamps
No longer blazed, when graſping in his hand
His dreadful ſword, he bent his eager ſteps
Towards the paſſes from all haunt now clear;
I gently chide him, What thy purpoſe now?

Why, Ajax, when no ſummons, nor the voice
Of herald calls thee, nor the trumpet's ſound,
Why thus ruſh forth? Now all the army ſleeps.
Few were his words, the tune of every tongue,
"To women ſilence gives their proper grace."
I ſtood rebuked, he iſſued forth alone.
What then befell I know not; he return'd
Driving in bonds the bulls, the herdſmen's dogs,
And lowing herds; ſome by his ſword were ſlain,
And hewn in pieces; ſome like captives bound,
Raging againſt the flocks, he ſcourged as men.
At length he iſſued from the tent, and held
Long converſe with ſome ſhadow; of the ſons
Of Atreus much, and of Ulyſſes much
He ſpoke, and laugh'd aloud, how their baſe deeds
He in this ſally amply had revenged.
Entering the tent again his ſenſe at length
Slow he regain'd; but when he ſaw the ground
With carnage cover'd thus, he ſmote his head,
And raiſed a mournful cry; then proſtrate lay
Stretch'd 'midſt the havoc of the ſlaughter'd flocks,
Rending with violence his hair. Long time
He lay, nor utter'd word; with rigorous threats
Then bade me tell him every circumſtance
Of what had paſs'd, and whence the carnage aſk'd
That lay around him: ſtruck with fear, my friends,

L. 290. This is from Calliſtratus, "As leaves are an ornament to trees, their fleeces to ſheep, their manes to horſes, the beard to men, ſo ſilence is an ornament to women." Schol.

Diſtinct

Diſtinct I told him all that had been done,
Far as I knew it; ſtrait with mournful cries
Loud he lamented; ſuch from him before
I never heard; for wailings he diſdain'd
As marks of baſe and abject minds, nor gave
His griefs a voice, but like a murmuring bull
Groan'd inwardly: and now in this ill plight,
Refuſing to be chear'd with food or wine,
Groveling amidſt the ſlaughter'd herds he ſits
In gloomy ſilence, forming in his mind
Some ill intent; this his imperfect words
And griefs denote. But, O my friends, (this cauſe
Impell'd me forth to ſeek you) go to him,
Give him your aid, if aught avails your pow'r;
Oft on ſuch minds the words of friends prevail.

CHORUS.

Daughter of Teuthras, dreadful to our ears
Thy words, that Ajax groans beneath ſuch ills.

AJAX, *within.*

Ah me, unhappy me!

TECMESSA.

To greater height it ſoon will riſe, I fear,
Did you not hear his loud and mournful groans?

AJAX, *within.*

Ah me, unhappy me!

CHORUS.

He ſeems diſorder'd now; or keen remorſe
For what is paſt with anguiſh ſtings his ſoul.

AJAX,

AJAX, *within.*

My ſon, my ſon!

TECMESSA.

Ah me! Euryſaces, for thee he calls.
What now impells him? Where art thou, my child?

AJAX, *within.*

Teucer! Where art thou, Teucer? In the prey
For ever active? whilſt I periſh here.

CHORUS.

His ſenſe ſeems perfect: open wide the doors:
Regard for us perchance may calm his mind.

TECMESSA.

Behold I open them: thou may'ſt now view
His deeds, and all the miſery of his ſtate.

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX.

My friends, who with me mount the ſtately bark,
Alone, of all my friends, to faith's firm law
Alone adhering, from the raging ſtorm
Behold what bloody waves around me ſwell.

CHORUS, *to Tecmeſſa.*

Thy words too ſtrongly bore the ſtamp of truth:
How high his frenzy roſe theſe deeds declare.

AJAX.

My brave aſſociates in each naval art,
Who graſp the ſtrong oar, and impell the bark

Light

Light bounding o'er the billows, you alone
With kind regard are preſent to my aid;
Draw all your ſwords, and end this hated life.

CHORUS.

Do not to ills ill medicines apply,
Nor a ſeverer anguiſh add to grief.

AJAX.

Thou ſeeſt the bold, the brave, the mighty Chief,
Intrepid in the ſhock of hoſtile arms,
Now dreadful 'midſt the herds ſecure of harm,
How to deriſion and reproach expoſed!

TECMESSA.

Not thus, my lord, loved Ajax, ſpeak not thus.

AJAX.

Wilt thou not hence, wilt thou not hence retire?
O wretch, wretch, wretch!

CHORUS.

Now, by the gods, be calm:
Let reaſon reaſſume its ſober rule.

AJAX.

Unhappy me, who let thoſe fiends accurſed
Eſcape my hands, and falling with wild rage
On the fair herds diſtain'd my ſword with blood!

CHORUS.

Why for deeds paſt ſhou'dſt thou afflict thy mind?
Immutably they muſt be what they are.

AJAX.

AJAX.

Thou ever lurking ſpy, thou ready tool
Always of every ill, of all the hoſt
The baſeſt, fouleſt, moſt inſidious wretch,
Son of Laertes, how wilt thou rejoice,
And laugh, and revel at my miſeries!

CHORUS.

Each, as the god aſſigns, or laughs or weeps.

AJAX.

Oh might I ſee him, though thus cruſh'd with ills!
Ah miſerable me!

CHORUS.

Proud menaces ill ſuit thy hapleſs ſtate.

AJAX.

O Jove, thou father of my anceſtors,
Firſt let me cruſh this wily juggling foe,
And the two Chiefs that with imperial pow'r
Command the Grecian hoſt, then let me die!

TECMESSA.

If ſuch thy wiſh, wiſh too that I may die:
For what is life to me, if thou art dead?

AJAX.

O darkneſs, now my light! Ye dreary ſhades
Of Erebus, to me ſole brightneſs now,
Receive, receive your habitant; receive
A wretch no longer worthy to behold

L. 375. Telamon, the father of Ajax, was the ſon of Æacus, Æacus was the ſon of Jupiter: Sic ab Jove tertius Ajax.

The

The race of gods, or mortal men! Me now
They nought avail: for me the potent queen,
Daughter of Jove, with vengeful hand afflicts
E'en to deſtruction. Whither can I fly?
Or where remain? My former fame, my friends,
Is loſt; and theſe laſt deeds have ſunk me down
With infamy amidſt theſe fooliſh ſpoils;
And all the hoſt takes arms againſt my life.

TECMESSA.

What grief is mine that ſo renown'd a Chief
Should ſpeak a language till this hour unheard!

AJAX.

Ye ſtreams that roll into the ſea, ye caves
Deep in the rocks that wind along the ſhore,
Thou grove on Ida's brow, long time, long time
Have you round Troy detain'd me; but no more
Shall you detain me breathing vital air:
This let each man, that hath his reaſon, know.
And thou, Scamander, flowing near theſe tents,
Benignant to the Grecians, ſhalt no more
Behold this man (thus proudly I will ſpeak)
Such as 'mongſt all the hoſt, that o'er her plains
March'd from the realms of Greece, Troy hath not ſeen:
Now, all his glory ſunk, thus low he lies.

CHORUS.

I have not pow'r, 'midſt theſe afflicting ills,
Or to repreſs, or to allow thy words.

AJAX.

Ah me! what heart could e'er conceive the thought
That Misery and Ajax should be found
So near allied! My very name conveys
The sound of woe, connected with such ills.
My father, 'midst the martial host of Greece
First in renown, and for his noble deeds
Graced with the prize of honour, to his house
Bore from this land of Ida all that arms
Could give of glorious boast. But I, his son,
To the same fields of Troy with no less strength
Advancing, deeds as noble by my hands
Atchieved, dishonour'd by the Argives lie,
And perish thus. Yet well am I assured
If now Achilles lived t' adjudge his arms
The prize of valour and exalted worth,
No man would take them from me: but the sons
Of Atreus, slighting my illustrious deeds,
Assign them to a wretch expert in wiles.
Had not my cheated eye, had not my sense
Perverted led me from my purpose wide,
Such judgement never had they giv'n again.
But now the dauntless goddess sprung from Jove,
Bearing the terrors of her gorgon shield,
E'en when my hand was raised against them, spread
Illusion round me, and my sense disturb'd
With frenzy, that amidst the herds I stain'd
My hands with blood; whilst they, against my will

Escaped,

Eſcaped, deride me. If th' immortal gods
Oppoſe him, e'en the daſtard ſhall eſcape
The brave man's vengeance. Me what now behoves?
'Gainſt me the hatred of the gods is ſhown,
The Grecian camp abhors me, and all Troy
Is hoſtile to me, and theſe fields around.
Shall I then quit this naval ſtation, leave
The ſons of Atreus, and my homeward courſe
Steer o'er th' Ægean ſea? But with what eye
Shall I behold my father? how preſent
My ſelf before him? Will he bear my ſight
Thus naked, with no martial honours graced,
Whoſe ample crown of glory he obtain'd?
It is not to be borne. What if I ruſh
Againſt the Trojan rampires, and alone
Their pow'rs aſſaulting, after noble deeds
Perform'd, find there an honourable death?
Thus I ſhould cauſe the ſons of Atreus joy.
This muſt not be: ſome means muſt be emprized
To ſhow my aged father that his ſon
Glows with the ſpirit of his high-born race.
For baſe his mind, who wiſhes length of life,
When ills, that hope no change, encloſe him round.
What pleaſure brings the day, which only adds
A day to life, for ſuch a little ſpace
Removing death? Him lightly I eſteem,
Who with vain hopes deludes his glowing heart.

To live with glory, or with glory die,
This is the brave man's part. You have my thoughts.

CHORUS.

No man will ever ſay theſe words are falſe;
They are the genuine dictates of thy heart.
Yet be thou ſoften'd; let thy friends prevail;
Appeaſe thy mind, nor harbour thoughts like theſe.

TECMESSA.

My lord, loved Ajax, no ſeverer ill,
Than the neceſſity of fate, can fall
On man's unhappy race. I was born free;
My father 'mongſt the Phrygians of high pow'r,
And ample wealth; but now I am a ſlave;
Such was the pleaſure of the gods, and ſuch
Thy puiſſant hand. Led from that hour to ſhare
Thy bed, to thee benevolent I deem
Thy wellfare mine; and by Epheſtian Jove,
By the dear tie that binds my fate to thine,
I now implore thee, leave me not expoſed
To the offenſive inſults of thy foes,
Ah, leave me not to other lords a ſlave!
For, ſhou'dſt thou die, abandon'd and bereaved
Of thee that very day, be thou aſſured,
I, with thy ſon, by ſome proud Argive ſeized
By force abhor'd, ſhall eat the wretched food
Of ſlavery; and ſome lord with bitter taunt

L. 477. Epheſtian Jupiter preſided over the Hearth ſhared in common by all who dwelled in the ſame houſe.

Shall cut me to the ſoul, and ſay, Behold
The wife of Ajax, of the Grecian hoſt
Once the moſt potent, from that envied height
Sunk to this abject ſtate of ſervitude;
Thus ſhall he taunt me, by ill fate depreſs'd,
With words to thee diſgraceful, and thy race.
But, ah! reſpect thy father, left to waſte
In grief the chearleſs hours of age; reſpect
Thy mother, to the weight of many years
Conſign'd; with pray'rs ſhe oft invokes the gods
To ſee thee in her houſe with life return'd.
Pity thy ſon, O king; of thee bereaved,
Who ſhall inſtruct and form his infant mind,
Left to unfriendly guardians? Shou'dſt thou die,
What ill to him and me doſt thou bequeath?
Nothing remains for me, to which mine eye
Looks up, ſave thee. Beneath thy conquering ſpear
My ruin'd country, and my mother ſunk;
Fate ſnatch'd my father to the realms below,
And both my parents have their manſion there.
What country will conſole me for thy loſs,
What wealth? On thee my all of ſafety reſts.
Then hold me in thy memory: it becomes
A man, if aught delightful to his ſoul
He hath received, to bear a grateful mind:
Kindneſs gives birth to kindneſs; in the heart
When grateful memory holds its ſeat no more,
The man to every generous ſenſe is loſt.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Oh that thy bosom, Ajax, felt, like mine,
The touch of pity! Thou wou'dst praise her words.

AJAX.

Great praise indeed from me she will obtain,
My mandates firmly if she dare perform.

TECMESSA.

All, my loved Ajax, all I will perform,
Obedient to thy will.

AJAX.

Bring then my son,
That I may see him.

TECMESSA.

By my fears alarm'd
Hence I removed him.

AJAX.

In these recent ills?
Or what thy fears?

TECMESSA.

Lest the unhappy child
By meeting thee should die.

AJAX.

With my ill fate
That had accorded.

TECMESSA.

Anxious was my care
Secure to keep him.

AJAX.

AJAX.

Prudent was the act;
I thank thee for the caution.

TECMESSA.

What beſides
Grateful to thee can I perform?

AJAX.

My ſon,
Let me ſpeak to him; let me ſee him.

TECMESSA.

Hence
Not far thy menial train attend their charge.

AJAX.

Why then to come before me this delay?

TECMESSA.

My ſon, thy father calls thee: in his hands
Whoe'er now holds him, hither let him haſte.

AJAX.

Comes he thus call'd, or hears he not thy voice?

TECMESSA.

Advancing near th' attendant with him comes.

EURYSACES *brought in.*

AJAX.

Bring him, nay bring him forward; for the ſight
Of the freſh blood, which from this carnage ſtreams,
Will not affright him, if he be my ſon.

Thus early in his father's rugged lore
He ſhould be train'd, and taught to catch the flame
That glows within this boſom. O my ſon,
Be happier than thy father; in all elſe
Be like him; ſo thou never canſt be baſe.
In this I deem thee bleſt, that to theſe ills
Thou art inſenſible; the ſweeteſt life
Conſiſts in feeling nothing; but by time
Thou wilt be taught to grieve and to rejoice.
When thou haſt reach'd that age, behoves thee ſhow
Among thy father's foes that thou art ſprung
Brave from the brave; meanwhile may gentle gales
Around thee breathe, and cheriſh thy young mind
To joy thy mother's ſoul. This well I know,
That not a Grecian with diſgraceful wrongs
Will dare oppoſe thee, though of me bereaved;
So firm a guardian o'er thee ſhall I leave
In Teucer, watchful to protect thy youth,
Though chaſing now in diſtant fields the foe.
But now, my brave aſſociates, train'd to lift
The ſhield in war, and ſweep the ſurging main,
I charge you all (refuſe me not this grace)
Announce my mandate to him, let him lead
This child to Salamis, and ſhow him there

L. 546. The original here is rendered unintelligible by the inſertion of this unhappy line.

Τὸ μὴ φρονεῖν γὰρ, κἂν τ' ἀνώδυνοι κακοὶ,

which Brunck rejects as ſpurious.

To

To Telamon, and her that ſhares his bed,
My mother Eribœa, that their age
He always may ſupport, till they deſcend
To the dark manſions of the king below.
Nor 'midſt contending Chiefs ſhall umpires ſit
My arms the prize of glory to adjudge,
Nor he, my baleful peſt: but thou, my ſon,
Retain my ample ſhield, its ſeven ſtrong plates
Unpierced by hoſtile ſpear; my other arms
Be buried with me.——Take thou now the boy,
And inſtant lead him hence; nor in the tent
Weep or lament; to wailings nature prompts
A woman's melting ſoul; compoſe thy mind:
When ulcer'd wounds the cutting ſteel require,
No myſtic charm the ſkilful leach applies.

CHORUS.

I tremble as I hear thy earneſt charge:
Unpleaſing to me are thy pointed words.

TECMESSA.

My lord, loved Ajax, what intends thy thought?

AJAX.

Aſk not, make no enquiries; teach thy mind
A calm compoſure; it becomes thee well.

TECMESSA.

Deſpair hangs heavy on me: by the gods,
And by thy ſon, thy pity I implore,
Ah, leave us not abandon'd and undone!

AJAX.

Thou doſt offend me highly: know'ſt thou not
That henceforth nothing to the gods I owe.

TECMESSA.

Speak words of happier import.

AJAX.

Vain thy cries.

TECMESSA.

Hear me, Oh hear me!

AJAX.

I have heard too much.

TECMESSA.

O king, I tremble.

AJAX.

Inſtant bear her hence.

TECMESSA.

Oh, by the gods, relent!

AJAX.

What folly this,
If thou canſt think my nature now to form!

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Illuſtrious Salamis, around whoſe ſhores
The ſea with all its wild waves roars,

L. 587. Nothing impious is here intended: the words of Ajax have the ſame ſignification as thoſe of Æneas over the dead body of Pallas,

Nos juvenem exanimum, et nil jam cœleſtibus ullis
Debentem, vano mœſti comitamur honore.

On which Ruæus ſays, Vivi ſubditi ſunt ſuperis diis, mortui inferis. Tecmeſſa underſtands them in this ſenſe, and deprecates the omen.—Camerarius.

Conſpicuous

Conſpicuous riſe thy cliffs ſublime,
And guard, loved iſle, thy happy plains.
Whilſt me an irkſome length of time
In Ida's marſhy vales detains:
Unheeded here a wretched life I lead,
Amidſt the flocks that graze the mead;
Year after year rolls ſlow away,
On me hope beams no chearful ray;
From miſery doom'd no pauſe to know
But in the dark and dreary realms below.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

The noble Ajax now with frenzy fired
(Some god the glowing rage inſpired)
Immedicable ills ſuſtains;
And with freſh pangs my heart is rent,
By thee amidſt embattled plains
To conqueſt and to glory ſent.
With grief th' illuſtrious hero we ſurvey
To gloomy madneſs now a prey;
And all his mighty deeds in war,
Deeds which the higheſt worth declare,
Are loſt, unwelcome to th' unkind,
While folly ſwells the proud Atridæ's mind.

STROPHE 2.

Hoary in her locks of age
And worn with many a rolling year,
With what affliction will his mother hear
Her frentic ſon's diſtemper'd rage!

Not in ſoft notes will ſhe complain,
Like Philomela's pity-moving ſtrain;
But ſhe will give loud griefs to riſe,
Lamenting with heart-piercing cries;
And in the anguiſh of deſpair
Beat her ſad breaſt, and rend her ſilver hair.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

In the ſilent ſhades below
Far better were thy doom to reſt,
Than thus to breathe the vital air, oppreſt
With dire diſeaſe and hopeleſs woe;
Thy train of kind affections loſt,
And all thy ſoul in frenzy's whirlwind toſt,
Thou high-born Chief, in martial fame
Surpaſſing all of Grecian name.
Theſe ills how will thy ſire deplore,
Ills to his noble race ne'er known before!

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX.

Time in the length of its unbounded courſe
Draws things obſcure to light, and ſinks in ſhades
The moſt conſpicuous: no event befalls,
But what might be expected; ſolemn oaths
Yield to aſſaults, and the obdurate mind.
And I, who late like temper'd ſteel retain'd
My firmneſs, by this woman have been taught
A ſofter tone. I pity her ſad ſtate,

Left

Left 'mongſt her foes a widow, and my ſon
An orphan. To the margin of the ſea
Hence then I go, and in the cleanſing wave
Waſh off theſe ſtains, if ſo I may appeaſe
The anger of the goddeſs. Where I find
A place unmark'd by human foot, this ſword,
The moſt abhor'd of weapons, in the ground
Deep-buried I will hide, where never eye
Shall ſee it more; let night, and hell's dark king
Keep it; for from the hour when I received
From Hector's hoſtile hand this gift, from Greece
No grateful meed, no honour have I ſhared.
Well was it ſaid, The gifts of hoſtile hands
Are ever hoſtile, and with miſchiefs fraught.
Henceforth then to the gods we know to yield,
And learn the ſons of Atreus to revere;
They are our Chiefs; behoves us to obey:
Why not? The harſheſt and the ſtrongeſt things
Yield to their higher ſovereigns: for this cauſe
The Winters ſtiff with all their ſnows give place
To Summer glowing with its beauteous fruits;
And the dark circle of the Night retires
That the fair Day may flame with orient light.
A ſoft gale breathes, and the tempeſtuous ſea,
Groaning beneath impetuous winds, is calm.
E'en all-ſubduing Sleep unbinds his chain,
And ſets his captives free. Why ſhould not I
Know gentler thoughts? This wiſdom I have learn'd,

That

That him, who is my foe, I ſo may hate
As one perchance to be my friend again;
And ſo far wiſh to aid my friend, as one
That may know change: for friendſhip is a port
In which our bark not always rides ſecure.
But theſe things ſhall be well. Within the tent
Retire, Tecmeſſa; with inceſſant vows
Implore the favouring gods that they would grant
My heart's warm wiſh. And you, my friends, with her
Thus honour me. To Teucer, when he comes
Give this my charge, that mine he make his care,
And be to you benevolent. I go
Where I muſt go: do you what I command.
Though wretched now, you ſoon perchance may know
That Ajax from his miſeries is relieved.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

This, Joy, is thy enraptured hour;
I feel thy fierce tumultuous pow'r.
Pan, Iö Pan, wild wanderer o'er each ſtrand,
From Cyllene's craggy brow
Cover'd with perpetual ſnow,
Amidſt the gods thou leader of the band.

L. 673. Negabat (Scipio) ullam vocem inimiciorem amicitiæ potuiſſe reperiri, quam ejus, qui dixiſſet, ita amare oportere, ut ſi aliquando eſſet oſurus; nec vero ſe adduci poſſe, ut hoc, quemadmodum putaretur, a Biante eſſe dictum crederet, qui ſapiens habitus eſſet unus e ſeptem, ſed impuri cujuſdam, aut ambitioſi, aut omnia ad ſuam potentiam revocantis eſſe ſententiam. &c. Cicero de amicitia. 16.

Pan,

Pan, Iö Pan, O king advance,
And ſhare thine own invented dance;
Such Gnoſſus ſees, and Nyſa's height;
Such meaſures now my bounding foot delight.
Haſt'ning o'er th' Icarian main,
Royal Phœbus, Delian king,
'Midſt my joy thy preſence deign,
And with thee all thy grace benignant bring!

ANTISTROPHE.

Now all our dark'ning ſorrow flies,
And the war brightens to our eyes:
Now all is tranſport; now the welcome day
Drives the ſickly gloom of night;
Now, O Jove, the glorious light
Our ſhips reviſits with its chearing ray:
For Ajax now no more retains
A ſenſe of his diſtracting pains;
Again his pious thoughts aſſign
Juſt honours to the gods, and rites divine.
Strong, O Time, thy withering pow'r:
Bright thou bring'ſt Hope's gladſome hour!
Our lord no more with anger burns,
And to the royal Chiefs his ſoul returns.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESSENGER.

My friends and fellow ſoldiers, what hath paſs'd
I wiſh to tell you. From the Myſian heights

Teucer is now arrived: ſoon as the camp
He enter'd, all the Argive troops at once
Reviled him; while yet diſtant they perceived
His ſteps advancing, the tumultuous croud
Gathers around him, and from every ſide
Inſults him with reproaches; not a man
Check'd his rude tongue; the brother this, they cry,
Of him, whoſe frentic treachery to the hoſt
Hath done foul wrong; yet ſhall not all thy pow'r
Protect him from our vengeance. To ſuch height
The tumult roſe, that they unſheath'd and ſhook
Their threatening ſwords; till ſome age-honour'd Chiefs
The ſwelling rage with ſoothing words appeaſed.
But where is Ajax? I would tell him this:
For all things to our lords we ought to ſhow.

CHORUS.

He is not in the tent; he late went forth,
His meaſures prudent, and his paſſions calm.

MESSENGER.

Alas, too late then hither was I ſent,
Or were my ſteps, falſe to my charge, too ſlow?

CHORUS.

What then is wanted, that required thy ſpeed?

MESSENGER.

Teucer gave charge that, till his preſence here,
Ajax be not allow'd to quit the tent.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

He is gone forth; but with more ſober thought,
Seeking to calm the anger of the gods.

MESSENGER.

Theſe words are full of folly, if the Seer,
Zealous to ſave him, aught of truth preſage.

CHORUS.

What preſage? Of this ſubject know'ſt thou aught?

MESSENGER.

Thus much I know; for I, as it befell,
Was preſent. From th' aſſembled kings apart,
Alone, and diſtant from th' imperial Chiefs,
Calchas retired, and with a friend's warm zeal
Graſping the hand of Teucer gave him charge
By all the arts could be deviſed this day,
That now ſhines o'er us, in his tent reſtrain'd
From pow'r of roving Ajax to ſecure,
If e'er he wiſh'd alive to ſee him more.
For through this day alone againſt him flames
The vengeance of Minerva: this the Seer
Pronounced, that uſeleſs and unwieldy ſtrength,
Cruſh'd by th' offended gods, in ruin ſinks,
When man of mortal birth with pride aſpires
Beyond a mortal. From his houſe in arms
When marching, thus preſumptuous he was found:
My ſon, his father well adviſed, in war
Be conqueſt thy high aim, but with the gods

Always to conquer: He with daring vaunt
Madly replied, The feeble, with the gods
His weakneſs aiding, conqueſt may obtain;
I, e'en without the gods, am confident
To ſnatch that glory. Such his haughty boaſt:
Nor once alone; but when Minerva's voice
Incited him againſt the foes to turn
His ſlaughtering hand, with unbeſeeming words
Fierce he replied, Thy favour, goddeſs, yield
To other Argives; through my poſt in arms
The war ſhall never break. With ſuch proud ſpeech
Himſelf beyond the ſtate of mortal man
Exalting, he to ruthleſs anger rouſed
The martial queen. But through this preſent day
If the impending danger he eſcape,
Our care may ſoon avert his fate, the god
No more oppoſing. Thus the prophet ſpoke;
And Teucer inſtant from th' imperial tent
Sent me to thee, with this high mandate charged,
To guard him. If we fail, he is no more,
If Calchas in th' events of fate be ſkill'd.

CHORUS.

O thou poor ſufferer, wretched in thy fate,
Come forth, Tecmeſſa, hear theſe words of woe;
For this cuts deep, and ruins all thy joy.

TECMESSA,

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TECMESSA.

Why have you rouſed me from my ſeat, where late
I found ſhort reſpite from oppreſſing ills?

CHORUS.

Hear thou this man: the charge he bears reſpects
The fate of Ajax, and excites my grief.

TECMESSA.

Speak, man; what ſay'ſt thou? Are we then undone?

MESSENGER.

Of thy fate I know nothing; but my hopes,
If Ajax from the tent be gone, are loſt.

TECMESSA.

He is: I therefore dread to hear thy charge.

MESSENGER.

This mandate Teucer gave, within the tent
To guard him, not allow'd to rove alone.

TECMESSA.

And where is Teucer? Why this mandate giv'n?

MESSENGER.

He lately is return'd; but fears th' event
Fatal to Ajax, if he roves abroad.

TECMESSA.

Ah wretched me, who taught him thus to fear?

MESSENGER.

The fate-foretelling Calchas on this day,
For this to Ajax brings or life or death.

TECMESSA.

Save him, my friends, oh ſave him; haſte, prevent
This harſh neceſſity of fate: fly ſome
To Teucer, let him come with ſwifteſt ſpeed:
Along the winding ſhores ſome to the weſt,
Some to the orient ſun direct your ſearch,
And find th' ill-omen'd wand'rings of your lord.
I know he hath deceived me; I am ſunk,
Ah me! an outcaſt from his former grace.
What ſhall I do, my ſon? Not linger here,
But go as far as I have ſtrength to go.
Let us then go, my friends; yes, let us fly;
This no time to ſit, if we would ſave
A man that ruſhes with ſuch ſpeed to die.

CHORUS.

I for the ſearch am ready; nor ſhall words
Alone, but zealous ſpeed my promptneſs ſhow.

AJAX.

There ſtands the ſlaughtering ſword, and bears its point
In readineſs to wound, as one would judge
At leiſure viewing it. This was the gift
Of Hector; never ſtranger to my ſoul
Like him was hateful, never to my eyes
Was one ſo odious. In the hoſtile ground
Of Troy fix'd firm it rears its ſharpen'd point.
I fix'd it deep, that friendly it might give
A ſpeedy death: this well I have prepared.

And

And now thy grace, O Jove, I firſt implore,
(So right requires) I ſhall not aſk the grant
Of ample honours; ſend ſome meſſenger,
Fraught with the mournful tidings of my death,
To Teucer, that he firſt may bear me hence
Fallen on this ſword freſh-dropping with my blood;
Nor let me by my foes firſt ſeen be caſt
To birds obſcene and hungry dogs a prey:
This I implore of thee, O Jove. Thee next,
Hermes, thou guide to the infernal realms,
Thee I invoke; be no fierce writhings mine
Of lingering and convulſive agonies;
But lead me gently to the ſhades below,
Soon as this ſword ſhall pierce my ſide. And you,
For ever virgins, and for ever prompt
To aid, for ever viewing all the ills
Of ſuffering mortals, in purſuit untired,
On you, ye aweful goddeſſes, I call;
Mark how I periſh, wretched in my fate,
Cruſh'd by the ſons of Atreus: their baſe hearts
May baſeſt miſeries rend; as they deſtroy,
Be they deſtroy'd; my blood as they behold
By mine own hand thus ſhed, be their blood ſhed
With rage remorſeleſs by the hands of thoſe

L. 837. Caſſandra in the Agamemnon of Æſchylus, makes the ſame prayer,

And further I adjure theſe gates of hell,
Well may the blow be aim'd, that whilſt my blood
Flows in a copious ſtream, I may not feel
The fierce convulſive agonies of death:
But gently ſink, and cloſe my eyes in peace.

Whom with parental love they hold moſt dear:
Go then, ye ſwift-avenging Furies, go,
Lap their vile blood, of all the Grecian hoſt
Spare not a man. And thou, O Sun, who rolleſt
Through yon ætherial height thy radiant car,
My country when thou ſeeſt, thy golden rein
Draw back, and to my aged father tell,
Tell the unhappy queen that gave me birth,
My miſeries and my death: the cries of grief,
When ſhe ſhall hear theſe tidings, ſhe will raiſe
Through all the city. But lamenting ſtrains
Have here no place: the deed muſt now be dared.
O Death, O Death, advance; behold me now;
Soon in thy manſions ſhall I dwell, and there
Hold converſe with thee. To the golden beams
Of this bright day; to thee, reſplendent Sun,
Rolling on high, I make my laſt addreſs,
Henceforth I never ſhall addreſs you more.
O light of heav'n; and O thou ſacred ſoil
Of Salamis, my country; O ye gods,
That guard my hearth; thou, Athens, high in fame,
And you, her ſons, with whom my youth was train'd;
Ye fountains here, ye rivers, and ye fields
Of Troy, by you I long have been ſuſtain'd;
You I addreſs, to you I bid farewell;
Ajax to you ſpeaks his laſt words; henceforth
My converſe will be in the realms beneath.

SEMI-

SEMICHORUS.

Toil brings increaſe of toil; for where, ah where
Have I not ranged to ſeek him? Yet no place
Knows to inform me.—Hiſt: I hear a ſound.

SEMICHORUS.

Our mates, who with us mount the gallant bark.

SEMICHORUS.

What tidings?

SEMICHORUS.

To the weſt along the ſhips
My weary ſteps have traced.

SEMICHORUS.

And haſt thou found——

SEMICHORUS.

Enough of toil, but nothing more in ſight.

SEMICHORUS.

Nor to the eaſt as I purſued my way
To me did any trace of him appear.

SEMICHORUS.

What pow'r, ah me! what pow'r of thoſe that rule,
Delighted with the taſk, the ocean-waves,
Holding his ſleepleſs ſeat; what god enthroned
On high Olympus; or what conſcious ſtream
That rolls his flood into the Boſphorus,
If he hath ſeen the ſtern unyielding Chief,
Will tell me where he wanders? Hard for me

L. 890. The Chorus here ſpeaks of Mount Ida and the ſea before him under Grecian names: there is another inſtance of this in the Philoctetes.

After long toils to ſink in blank deſpair,
Nor find where from my ſight conceal'd he lies.

TECMESSA, *in the grove.*

Ah me! Ah me!

CHORUS.

What voice of mourning from the grove reſounds?

TECMESSA.

O thou unhappy!

CHORUS.

I ſee th' ill-fated captive of his ſpear
Tecmeſſa, bending as oppreſs'd with woe.

TECMESSA.

Woe, ruin, deſolation cloſe me round.

CHORUS.

What hath befallen?

TECMESSA

Behold, behold, my friends, yet warm in death
Where Ajax lies, roll'd on his deep-plunged ſword.

CHORUS.

Alas for my return! Ah, thou haſt ſlain
With thee, O king, thy comrade in the bark.
O wretched me! O thou afflicted dame!

TECMESSA.

I at this ſight have cauſe indeed for grief.

CHORUS.

Whoſe hand employ'd he in this deed of death?

TECMESSA.

TECMESSA.

Doubtleſs his own: fix'd in the ground the ſword,
On which he fell, of this gives certain proof.

CHORUS.

Thy loſs to me is ruin. Thou in blood
Haſt fallen alone, and nigh thee not a friend
To guard thee. I was witleſs, void of ſenſe,
Thus to neglect thee. Where lies Ajax, where
Lies the indignant, ſtern, ill-fated Chief?

TECMESSA.

It is a ſight of horror: I will wrap
This robe around him, with its ample folds
Covering his corſe: for none, that was his friend,
Can bear to ſee him from his noſtrils breathe
The purple gore, and from the blackening wound
By his own hand inflicted. Wretched me,
What can I do? What friend will bear him hence?
Where now is Teucer? Hither ſhould he bend
His ſteps, how opportunely would he come
The corſe of his fallen brother to compoſe!
O hapleſs Ajax, what heroic worth
Was thine! What art thou now? Such, that thy foes
Would pity thee, and o'er thee drop a tear.

CHORUS.

Fix'd was thy purpoſe, yes, ill-fated Chief,
Inflexibly thy heart was fix'd to ſeize
Fit time t' accompliſh this diſaſtrous end

Of thy unbounded griefs: ſuch were thy groans
By night, by day; ſuch thy relentleſs hate,
With paſſions breathing ruin, 'gainſt the ſons
Of Atreus. The deep cauſe of all thy ills
Roſe from the conteſt for the glorious meed
To valour due, the arms Achilles wore.

TECMESSA.

Ah wretched me!

CHORUS.

This ſtrong affliction pierces to thy heart.

TECMESSA.

Ah wretched, wretched me!

CHORUS.

I marvel not at thy repeated groans,
Lamenting the dear loſs of ſuch a friend.

TECMESSA.

Thou canſt but think ſo, while I feel it deep.

CHORUS.

My thoughts aſſent to thine.

TECMESSA.

Alas my ſon,
What yokes of ſlavery go we now to bear!
What eyes ſhall o'er us keep malignant watch!

CHORUS.

'Midſt theſe thy ſorrows the unfeeling hearts
Of the Atridæ, and their ruthleſs deeds
Thou waileſt: but the gods avert ſuch ills!

TECMESSA.

TECMESSA.

Theſe things had not been thus, but by the gods.

CHORUS.

They ſink thee with an heavy weight of woes.

TECMESSA.

The dreadfull goddeſs, Pallas, ſprung from Jove,
To grace Ulyſſes, gave theſe evils birth.

CHORUS.

With inſolence this deep-deſigning Chief
Swells his dark mind; and at theſe ills, which ſprung
From frenzy, jeers with many a bitter mock;
With him, (O grief!) theſe tidings heard, will join
The ſons of Atreus, our imperial Chiefs.

TECMESSA.

And let them mock, in his calamities
Let them exult: the time perchance may come,
Though whilſt he lived they lightly prized his worth,
They may lament him dead with many a groan,
And want him in the dreadful ſhock of war.
The impotent of mind, whilſt in their hands
They hold a treaſure, know not how to prize
Its worth, till from them it be ſnatch'd away.
To me his death brings ſorrow, joy to them;
To him it was moſt pleaſing ſo to die,
It was the conſummation of his wiſh.
Have they then cauſe to triumph in his death?
No: by the gods he died, and not by them.

Then let Ulyſſes ſwell with pride, none now
Oppoſing. Ajax lives for them no more,
But in his death to me leaves woes and groans.

TEUCER, *not in ſight.*

Ah miſerable me!

CHORUS.

Be ſilent; for methinks I hear the voice
Of Teucer, mournful for this ill its notes.

TEUCER, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TEUCER.

O Ajax, O my brother, to my ſoul
Moſt dear, haſt thou, as loudly fame reports,
With all thy virtues purchaſed this reward!

CHORUS.

O Teucer, thou muſt know it; he is dead.

TEUCER.

Ah, what a weight of miſery is mine!

CHORUS.

Afflictions great as theſe——

TEUCER.

Oh wretched me!

CHORUS.

Give ample cauſe for grief.

TEUCER.

Diſaſtrous fate!

CHORUS.

Teucer, we feel its weight.

TEUCER.

TEUCER.

Ill-fated man!

Where, in the realms of Troy where is his ſon?

CHORUS.

Alone within the tent.

TEUCER.

Go then with ſpeed,
And bring him hither, leſt ſome daring hand
With hoſtile force ſhould ſeize him, like the whelp
Of a lone lioneſs. Go, ſpare no toil:
All will inſult the dead, when low they lie.

TEUCER, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Teucer, to thee, while yet he lived, this charge,
To which affection prompts thee now, he gave.

TEUCER.

Of all the ſights, which e'er my eyes beheld,
Moſt mournfull this; my feet ne'er trod a path
Which led to grief, that rends the heart, like this,
Through which, O deareſt Ajax, of thy death
Soon as inform'd, I follow'd thee, and traced
Thy ſteps; for quick through all the Grecian camp
The rumour of thy dreadful fate was ſpread,
As of ſome god: I heard it with diſmay,
And diſtant then groan'd deep; I ſee it now,
And ſink oppreſs'd with miſery. Go, remove
That robe, that all the ill theſe eyes may view.

Oh,

Oh, what a ſight of horror! What a deed
Of daring deſperation! What a ſtore
Of woes haſt thou in death laid up for me!
For whither, to what people can I go,
In thy diſtreſs who gave thee not my aid?
Will Telamon, the father of us both,
With gentle looks and well-affection'd mind
Receive me, without thee? Will he do this,
Who never, e'en in proſperous fortune, wore
A pleaſing ſmile? Much rather will he give
His rage full ſcope, and wound me with reproach,
That from a ſlave, the captive of his arms,
Baſe-born, through cowardice and abject fear,
Or with a villain's wiles, I have betray'd
Thee, my dear Ajax, to enjoy thy ſtate
And rich poſſeſſions. Thus, to anger prompt
By nature, and through age now more ſevere,
He to high paſſions will give way, and urge
A charge againſt me I have not deſerved:
Thus rated as a ſlave ſhall I be driven
An outcaſt from my country. This my doom
At Salamis: but on the coaſt of Troy
I ſhall find many enemies, but few
To favour me, and all this through thy death.
But how, ah wretched me! how ſhall I draw
Thy body from this ſharp deep-piercing ſword?

L. 1024. The hilt was fixed in the ground, ſo that he could not draw the ſword from the body; the body muſt be raiſed over its point. He ſpeaks in the act.

It

It vibrates in the ground. Unhappy man,
By whom art thou thus ſlaughter'd! Did thy thought
Conceive that e'er the fatal time would come
When Hector, though long dead, ſhould work thy death?
Mark, by the gods, the fate of both the Chiefs:
Bound by the radiant belt, which Ajax gave,
Was Hector by the rolling chariot drag'd
Till he expired; and Ajax by the ſword,
The gift of Hector, falls and lies in blood.
Did not the Furies forge that ſlaughtering ſword,
And hell's dread monarch, ruthleſs artiſt, frame
That belt? Theſe things I deem, and all th' events
Befalling mortal man, are by the gods
Always aſſign'd. Is there whoſe mind diſſents?
Let him enjoy his thoughts: but theſe are mine.

CHORUS.

Of this no more; but be thy thoughts employ'd
How to entomb this corſe, and what reply
Thou ſoon wilt make: I ſee a foe, who comes
With rancorous malice to inſult thy grief.

L. 1027. Non interrogantis hoc, ſed, enſe cognito, mirantis.

L. 1031. This is from Homer: after the ſingle combat of theſe heroes, the gallant Hector ſays to Ajax, Iliad. vii. v. 363.

But let us, on this memorable day,
Exchange ſome gift, that Greece and Troy may ſay;
"Not hate, but glory, made theſe Chiefs contend,
While each brave foe was in his ſoul a friend."

With that, a ſword with ſtars of ſilver grac'd,
The baldric ſtudded, and the ſheath enchac'd,
He gave the Greek. The gen'rous Greek beſtow'd
A radiant belt that rich with purple glow'd.

TEUCER.

Whom from the camp advancing doſt thou ſee?

CHORUS.

The Spartan, in whoſe cauſe we ſail'd to Troy.

TEUCER.

I ſee him near, now eaſy to be known.

MENELAUS, TEUCER, CHORUS.

MENELAUS.

Forbear; to thee I ſpeak; remove not hence
That body; let it, as it is, remain.

TEUCER.

In ſuch a mandate why thus waſte thy words?

MENELAUS.

I will it, and ſo wills th' imperial Chief.

TEUCER.

But ſay, what cauſe canſt thou for this aſſign?

MENELAUS.

Is there not cauſe? From Salamis we hoped
That we ſhould bring him an ally to Greece,
And faithful friend; but found him, put to proof,
More hoſtile than the Phrygians; for he plann'd
His bloody purpoſe to aſſault by night,
And ſpread deſtruction with his raging ſword
Through all the army: and if this attempt
Some god had not defeated, we had found
The fate now fall'n on him; we had been ſlain,

In blood with horror roll'd, and he had lived.
But now ſome god from us his hoſtile rage
Averted, on the flocks and herds to fall.
For this juſt cauſe there is no man that breathes
So potent as to entomb this corſe with rites
Of ſepulture; but on the weed-clad ſand
To all the birds that ſcream along the ſhore
It ſhall be caſt a prey. Nay, do not ſwell
With rude and boiſterous arrogance: alive
If he diſdain'd our pow'r, we will at leaſt
Command him dead, nor aſk thy leave, but force
Shall ratify our will; for whilſt he lived
My mandates never would his pride obey.
It is the mark of a malignant mind,
When one, not raiſed above the common rank,
Scorns to obey his rulers. In a ſtate
Never can laws be well enforced, where fear
Supports not their appointment; and an hoſt
In arms o'erleaps the modeſt bounds of rule,
By fear and reverence to their Chiefs unawed.
And it behoves a man, though large his limbs
And vaſt his ſtrength, to think that he may fall
E'en by a petty ill. But know thou this,
Where modeſty and fear unite, they bring
Protection; but licentious arrogance,
That gives full ſail to its intemperate will,
Shall ſink the ſtate, though proudly for awhile
She rides before a fair and favouring gale.

Fear then ſhould know its place: nor let us think
That as our wild wills urge us if we act,
We ſhall not ſuffer juſt returns of ill:
Theſe have their courſe alternate. In times paſt
His inſolence flamed high; I triumph now,
And charge thee not to interr him, leſt perchance
Entombing him thou ſink into the tomb.

CHORUS.

Do not, O king of Sparta, from thy lips
Whilſt wiſdom ſpeaks its dictates, wrong the dead.

TEUCER.

No more, my friends, if one of low-born race
Acts baſely, ſhall I marvel, ſince the great,
Who glory in their high-traced anceſtry,
Thus merit cenſure for diſhoneſt ſpeech.
Didſt thou not tune thy proeme with theſe words,
(Speak them again) that thou didſt bring this man
To Troy, received as an ally to Greece?
Did he not plough the deep, and join the war
Lord of himſelf? Where then thy pow'r o'er him?
What right haſt thou as ſovereign to command
The warlike troops he led, and was their Chief?
Thou cameſt the king of Sparta, not our lord.
The law of martial rule gave no command
To thee o'er him, more than to him o'er thee.
Subjection to ſuperior pow'r is here
Thy duty, not to lead th' aſſociate force
Of Greece, that thou o'er Ajax ſhou'dſt bear ſway.

Rule

Rule thy own vaſſals, and with high-ſwoln vaunts
Keep them in awe. Forbid it thou, or he
The other chieftain, him with hallow'd rites
I will entomb, nor fear thy empty threats.
Not for thy wife did Ajax join the war,
His was no mercenary ſpear; his oath
He held in reverence high, not thee, nor deign'd
To grace the worthleſs. Take then my reſolve,
Bring all thy heralds, bring th' imperial Chief;
Not for thy clamours will I turn aſide
From my intent. I know thee what thou art.

CHORUS.

Such words, around us whilſt afflictions preſs,
Have not my approbation; they are harſh,
And, though to reaſon highly juſt, wound deep.

MENELAUS.

This archer bears, it ſeems, a lofty mind.

TEUCER.

Mine is no vulgar art.

MENELAUS.

How wou'dſt thou vaunt,
If thou cou'dſt bear a ſhield?

TEUCER.

Thy force in arms
Thus naked I defy.

MENELAUS.

Thy tongue is bold,
With pride o'erflowing.

TEUCER.

When the cauſe is juſt,
An honeſt pride may be indulged.

MENELAUS.

How juſt,
To honour him that ſlew me?

TEUCER.

Slew thee! Strange,
That dead thou yet ſhou'dſt live.

MENELAUS.

The gods preſerved
My life; he elſe had kill'd me.

TEUCER.

By their grace
Preſerved, diſhonour not the gods.

MENELAUS.

Their laws
What ſhows me prone to violate?

TEUCER.

Thy charge
Not to entomb the dead.

MENELAUS.

They were my foes.
My honour thus requires.

TEUCER.

'Gainſt thee a foe
Did Ajax ever lead?

MENELAUS.

MENELAUS.

I hated him,
He hated me: thou know'ſt this.

TEUCER.

In the votes
Thou waſt found falſe and fraudulent.

MENELAUS.

That blame
Be theirs, who from the urns drew forth the lots,
Not mine.

TEUCER.

By ſtealth, and baſely canſt thou do
Many baſe deeds.

MENELAUS.

Thoſe words ſhall coſt thee dear.

TEUCER.

Not more perchance than we ſhall well repay.

MENELAUS.

In brief I ſay he ſhall not be entomb'd.

TEUCER.

Hear thou my anſwer, He ſhall be entomb'd.

MENELAUS.

Erewhile I ſaw a man of doughty tongue
Rating the mariners to hoiſt their ſails,
While a ſtorm threaten'd: but when danger roſe,
Howling amidſt the tempeſt, not a word
From that bold tongue was heard; wrapt in his cloak

He

He lay, and ſuffer'd every ſailor's foot
At will to trample on him. So the force
Of an impetuous tempeſt burſting black
From a ſmall cloud may in a moment check
Thee, and thy boiſterous tongue, and all thy noiſe.

TEUCER.

And I once ſaw a man, with folly fraught
Inſulting thoſe around him when oppreſs'd
With ills. A man reſembling me, and warm
With my free ſpirit, ſaw him, and rebuked
With words like theſe, Vain mortal to the dead
Offer no wrong; elſe, be aſſured, that wrong
Shall be repaid with vengeance. Thus he warn'd
The futile wretch. Methinks I ſee him: thou
Art he, no other. Speak I riddles now?

MENELAUS.

Ill it becomes me to rebuke with words
One whom my pow'r can force. I leave thee now.

TEUCER.

Go, get thee hence: to me it were a ſhame
To liſten to a ſlight man's ſenſeleſs words.

TEUCER, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

To outrage ſoon will this contention riſe.
But haſte thee, Teucer, with the utmoſt ſpeed
Mark ſome fit place, within whoſe hallow'd mold

Thou

Thou may'ſt interr him, and a dreary tomb,
A monument to future ages, raiſe.

TEUCER.

And in meet time his ſon and wife approach.
To deck the tomb of the unhappy dead.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, TEUCER, CHORUS.

TEUCER.

Come hither, child, ſtand near, with ſuppliant hands
Touch him that gave thee birth: now take thy ſeat
Lowly beſide his knees, and in thy hands
Hold thou my hair, and hers, and thine, the laſt
Sad gift of mourning ſuppliants. From the camp
By force ſhould any drag thee from the dead,
May the wretch find a wretched death, and lie
In a ſtrange land unburied, all his race
Cut off, as I cut off theſe locks. My child,
Take them, and keep them: let no ruffian force
Remove thee hence, but cloſely claſp the dead.
And ſtand not you like women round the corſe,
But guard it well like men, till I return,
And bear him to the tomb, whoe'er oppoſe.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

When will the laſt revolving year
Of all this numerous train
Slow-wandering in its courſe appear
'Midſt ills I here ſuſtain?

Toils riſe on toils, and woes on woes,
The waſteful war around us glows,
And miſery haunts this place.
The hateful walls of Troy around,
Unhappy Greece, what haſt thou found,
But ruin and diſgrace?

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Oh had he firſt been ſwept away
Through air by wild winds toſt;
Or ſunk from heav'n's ætherial ray
To Pluto's dreary coaſt;
Who train'd the Grecians to the field,
Taught them the ſword, the ſpear to wield,
And ſteel'd the gentle mind!
Hence toil gives birth to toil again,
Hence carnage ſtains th' enſanguin'd plain,
For he deſtroy'd mankind.

STROPHE 2.

Nor the brow with chaplets bound
Breathing balmy odours round,
Nor the ſocial glow of ſoul
Kindling o'er the generous bowl,
Nor the dulcet ſtrain that rings
Jocond from the ſounding ſtrings,
Nor endearing love's delight
That with rapture fills the night,
Me will he permit to prove;
He, alas! hath murder'd love.

But neglected here I lie
Open to th' inclement ſky;
And my rough and matted hair
Drinks the dews of night's moiſt air,
Memorials ſad of Troy!

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Yet, till now, when pale affright
Roll'd her hideous form through night,
Great in arms, his ſhield t' oppoſe,
Ajax as my rampire roſe,
And my terror was no more.
Now the hero I deplore
To the gloomy god conſign'd;
Now what joy can touch my mind?
Oh that on the pine-clad brow
Dark'ning o'er the ſea below,
Where the cliffs of Sunium riſe,
Rocky bulwarks, to the ſkies,
I were placed; with ſweet addreſs
Sacred Athens would I bleſs,
And feel a ſocial joy!

TEUCER, TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

TEUCER.

I ſaw th' imperial Chief with haughty ſtep
Advancing, therefore haſten'd my return.
Expect a torrent of opprobrious words.

AGAMEMNON, TEUCER, &c.

AGAMEMNON.

Thee to burſt forth in rude contemptuous ſpeech
Againſt us, by our vengeance not chaſtiſed,
Thee doth this daring inſolence become,
Sprung from a ſlave the captive of the ſpear?
Had ſhe, who gave thee birth, been high in rank,
How proudly wou'dſt thou vaunt, and rear thy creſt,
Since, nothing as thou art, for one who now
Is nothing, thou haſt dared to ſcorn our rule,
Aſſerting that we came not o'er the hoſt
Or fleet of Greece commanders, nor o'er thee;
And Ajax, ſuch thy deſcant, plough'd the ſea
Lord of himſelf. How ſhameful from a ſlave
To hear ſuch arrogance? And what was he,
For whom theſe haughty clamours thou haſt raiſed?
Whither did he advance, where fix his foot,
Where mine I fix'd not? In the Grecian camp
Was no man brave but he? Unpleaſant fruit
The conteſt for the hero's arms propoſed
Affords us, if by Teucer in each place
Proclaim'd unjuſt; and canker'd envy ſtill
Baſely repines to yield the honours due
To higher merit, where the general voice
Adjudged them; and with rude licentious tongue
You load me with reproaches, or with guile,
Your vain ambition fruſtrate, ſtab at me.
Were moods like theſe indulged, no law could ſtand

On a firm baſis, if the right adjudged
We ſhould reject, and in the higheſt rank
Place thoſe to whom the loweſt is aſſign'd.
But theſe things muſt be check'd. The high-built frame,
The maſſy-ſtructured limb, the hardy nerve
Yield not protection; but the prudent mind
The conqueſt every where obtains. The oxe,
Though vaſt his bulk, is taught the path preſcribed
By a ſmall whip: this diſcipline, I ſee,
Will ſoon reach thee, ſome prudence if thy mind
Acquire not, for a man that is no more,
But now a ſhade, thus daring to inſult,
And pour the torrent of opprobrious ſpeech.
Wilt thou ne'er feel the curb of modeſty?
Ne'er know the baſeneſs of thy birth, and bring
Some one of generous blood to ſpeak for thee?
No meaning to my ears thy words convey;
I underſtand not thy barbaric ſpeech.

CHORUS.

Oh that your minds to gentler thoughts were calm'd!
My ſoul can form no better wiſh for each.

TEUCER.

Ah me, how ſoon the memory of the dead
Fades from the faithleſs mind, and is effaced,
Thee, Ajax, in his favour, e'en in things
To him of little import, ſince this man
No longer holds! Yet oft haſt thou expoſed
Thy life for him with toil in bloody fields.

But all these things are vanish'd, and have left
No trace behind. Thy tongue abounds with words,
Vain-talker! but is all remembrance lost?
Can'st thou forget, within your works enclosed,
When all was rout, confusion, and dismay,
Alone he came, he saved you? When the flames
Blazed on your lofty decks, when o'er the trench
Hector had leap'd, and on your navy roll'd
The thunder of the war, who check'd his force?
Was not the glorious action his, who ne'er,
Thou say'st, advanced his foot? Did not for you
His valour these heroic deeds atchieve?
Nay more, 'gainst Hector shield to shield opposed
He stood in dreadful fight, by choice, not chance;
No coward lot into the 'midst he threw,
No clod of moisten'd earth; but with light bound
What from the crested helmet first would leap.
These were his noble deeds: with him I stood,
This slave, from a barbaric mother born.
What was thy view in this unhappy taunt?
Thy father's father, Pelops of old times,
Was a barbaric Phrygian: know'st thou this?
Know'st thou that Atreus was thy sire, of men
Most impious, to his brother at a feast
Who served up his own sons. From Crete her birth
Thy mother drew; and when thy father found
His bed polluted with adulterous lust,

L. 1327. See the Electra of Euripides, L. 786.

He

He caſt her to the monſters of the main.
From ſuch art thou deſcended; and my birth
Dareſt thou revile, from Telamon derived,
My father, whoſe illuſtrious deeds in arms
Shone with the brighteſt ſplendor, and obtain'd
My mother to his bed, of royal blood,
The daughter of Laomedon, the prize
Of higheſt honour by Alcides giv'n?
Thus noble, and from noble parents ſprung,
Should I diſhonour thoſe whoſe blood I ſhare,
Whom thou, thus miſerably fall'n, wou'dſt caſt
Unburied forth? Nor doſt thou bluſh, this threat
Denouncing. But of this be thou aſſured,
Him if your violence caſt forth, us three
Shall it caſt forth together with him laid.
To me more glorious 'midſt this honeſt toil
I deem it in a brother's cauſe to die,
Than for thy wife, or for thy brother's. Go,
Of me regardleſs, yet regard thy ſelf:
Me if thou wrong, thou ſhalt have cauſe to wiſh
That coward fear had check'd thy daring pride.

ULYSSES, AGAMEMNON, TEUCER, TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

In happy hour, Ulyſſes, art thou come,
If not to heighten, but allay this ſtrife.

L. 1334. Heſione, ſiſter of Priam.

ULYSSES.

ULYSSES.

Soldiers, what ſtrife? for our imperial chief
Loud o'er this brave man's corſe I heard from far.

AGAMEMNON.

E'en now, O king Ulyſſes, from this man
The baſeſt language of reproach I heard.

ULYSSES.

Reproach! I blame not him who, when reviled,
Retorts indignant the ungracious words.

AGAMEMNON.

Him I rebuked for his baſe deeds to me.

ULYSSES.

What hath he done to merit ſuch rebuke?

AGAMEMNON.

He will not ſuffer, he declares, this corſe
To lie unhonour'd with ſepulchral rites,
But will entomb it, and defies my pow'r.

ULYSSES.

Is then a friend allow'd to ſpeak the truth,
The former bond of concord yet preſerved?

AGAMEMNON.

Speak; I were elſe unwiſe: for thee I deem
Of all the Grecians moſt my faithful friend.

ULYSSES.

Then hear me. By the gods, remorſeleſs thus
Form not the thought to caſt this body forth
Unburied; nor let violence tranſport

Thy

Thy ſoul ſo far to hate, as under foot
To trample juſtice. Once he was to me
Of all the camp moſt hoſtile, from the time
I triumph'd in the conteſt for the arms
Of loſt Achilles: yet, though ſuch his mind
To me averſe, I would not wrong his worth,
Refuſing to his valour this juſt praiſe,
That him, of all the Grecian Chiefs who march'd
To Troy, I ſaw the braveſt in the field,
Except Achilles. Such a man by thee
Unjuſtly were diſhonour'd: not to him,
But to the gods, and to their ſacred laws
This were offence. A brave man, when no more,
Though hated once, it is unjuſt to wrong.

AGAMEMNON.

Doſt thou, Ulyſſes, ſtriving in his cauſe,
Oppoſe my will?

ULYSSES.

I do. I hated him,
Whilſt honour bade me hate him.

AGAMEMNON.

O'er his corſe
Shou'dſt thou not triumph?

ULYSSES.

In ungenerous joys
Exult not, ſon of Atreus.

AGA-

AGAMEMNON.

Not with eaſe
Is a king pious.

ULYSSES.

Well-adviſing friends
He may hold high in honour.

AGAMEMNON.

Regal pow'r
A good man ſhould obey.

ULYSSES.

Forbear: for thine
The conqueſt, when thou yieldeſt to thy friends.

AGAMEMNON.

Remember what a man it is thy wiſh
To honour thus.

ULYSSES.

He was indeed my foe,
But once moſt brave.

AGAMEMNON.

What wou'dſt thou? Why this zeal,
This reverence for the hated dead?

ULYSSES.

With me
O'er hatred virtue triumphs.

AGAMEMNON.

By mankind
Such are deem'd ſpiritleſs.

ULYSSES.

ULYSSES.

Our friends we find
Oft changed to bitter foes.

AGAMEMNON.

To gain such friends
Wouldst thou feel pleasure?

ULYSSES.

The obdurate mind
Gives me no pleasure.

AGAMEMNON.

This day thou wilt show
Our souls subdued by fear.

ULYSSES.

No: to all Greece
I show your justice.

AGAMEMNON.

Wou'dst thou that I grant
This corse to be entomb'd?

ULYSSES.

Such is my wish;
For to the tomb I must descend.

AGAMEMNON.

All act
That for themselves like grace they may receive.

ULYSSES.

Who than myself hath juster right to gain
Advantage from my toils?

AGAMEMNON.

This ſhall be call'd
Thy deed, not mine.

ULYSSES.

But thine ſhall be the praiſe.

AGAMEMNON.

To thee, be thou aſſured, a greater grace
With pleaſure I would yield; but him, or caſt
Unburied forth, or in the earth entomb'd,
My hatred ever will purſue. Do thou,
Thou haſt my leave, what moſt thy ſoul approves.

ULYSSES, TEUCER, TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Whoe'er, Ulyſſes, holds thy wiſdom cheap,
Such ſince thy generous ſpirit, is unwiſe.

ULYSSES.

Now, Teucer, hear me ſpeak my honeſt thoughts.
I was thy foe; henceforth I am thy friend;
And with thee wiſh t' entomb the dead, to ſhare
Thy toils, and every ſolemn rite provide
From mortals due to grace the nobleſt dead.

TEUCER.

Thy words, Ulyſſes, claim my praiſe, my thanks;
They ſhow a noble nature, far beyond
My expectation. In the Grecian camp
None was, like thee, his foe; yet thou alone
Haſt ſpirit to protect him, and oppoſe

With high disdain all insult to the dead;
Whilst with wild outrage frentic came the Chief,
He and his brother, with malignant will
To cast him out unhonour'd with a tomb.
For this may the almighty fire enthroned
On this Olympus, may Erinnys still
Mindful of wrongs, and Justice that effects,
Though late, her solemn purpose, on their heads
Inflict disgraceful vengeance, as they wish'd
To cast him out, unworthily disgraced,
Deprived of sepulture. Thy offer'd aid,
Son of Laertes, in these funeral rites
I fear, the dead revering, to accept,
Lest it offend his shade. In all besides
Assist us. From the camp if thou wilt send
Others to grace the dead, it will not grieve
My mind. These obsequies let me prepare;
And know thy goodness hath my warm applause.

ULYSSES.

It was my wish to aid thee in these rites;
But since not pleasing to thy heart my aid,
I leave thee, and thy pious plea approve.

TEUCER.

Enough: already hath too much of time
Been wasted. Some prepare the hollow'd earth;
Some for the pure ablutions o'er the flames
Place the tall tripod; let one social band
Bring from the tent the hero's radiant arms.

And thou, my child, with filial reverence touch
Thy father; raiſe thou with what ſtrength thou haſt,
With me, his ſides, for from his veins yet warm
Spouts the black blood; let each man preſent here,
Who feels the glow of friendſhip, rouſe his zeal,
Attend and toil in honour of the dead,
Once great in every virtue; whilſt he lived,
No mortal with ſuperior luſtre ſhone.

CHORUS.

Mortals from what they ſee their knowlege gain;
But ere he ſees, no prophet's piercing mind
The dark events of future fate can know.

PHILOCTETES.

PHILOCTETES.

PHILOCTETES.

PHILOCTETES, the friend and companion of Hercules, to whom that hero at his death conſigned his invincible bow and arrows, joined the Grecian armament againſt Troy with ſeven ſhips. In their paſſage the fleet anchored at Chryſe, a little iſland in the Ægean ſea; as Philoctetes was there ſearching for an Altar on which Hercules, in his expedition againſt Troy, had ſacrificed, he was wounded in the foot by the envenomed bite of a ſerpent; the conſequence of which was a putrid and incurable ulcer; this became very offenſive, and its anguiſh forced from the unhappy ſufferer cries and imprecations which diſturbed their ſacrifices. The fleet proceeded to Lemnos; on that wild and uninhabited coaſt Ulyſſes and Diomede, by the command of Agamemnon and Menelaus, barbarouſly expoſed him while he ſlept, and continued their courſe without him. There he ſupported his miſerable life till the tenth year of the war; Helenus then announced the decrees of fate to the Grecian Chiefs, that Troy could not be ſubdued till Philoctetes ſhould appear before it with the bow and arrows of Hercules. Ulyſſes voluntarily engaged to bring the expoſed warrior and his fatal arms to the Grecian camp, and took Neoptolemus with him as his aſſociate in this expedition. The drama opens with their arrival at Lemnos; and their attempts to carry Philoctetes to Troy conſtitute

ſtitute its action. From this ſimplicity of ſubject the genius of Sophocles has formed the moſt beautiful, the moſt tender, and the moſt intereſting ſcenes; there is not a more pleaſing drama among all the remains of the Athenian theatre, nor one that touches the heart with purer ſenſibility. The character of Ulyſſes is finely ſupported; always called forth where ſuperior wiſdom is required, he is prudent, calm, and verſatile; he maintains the dignity of the hero, even while he deſcends to artifice and fraud; for his own private intereſt is never the object of his attention, but he always exerts himſelf with unremitting vigour in obedience to his commanders, and in the ſervice of his country. In contraſt with this cool unfeeling veteran ſtands the young, the generous, the amiable Neoptolemus, ambitious of the hero's glory, but averſe to the ſtateſman's fraud; this very deſire of glory ſuffers him for a moment to be drawn aſide from juſtice, contrary to the dictates of his noble nature; but he melts with pity at the ſight of diſtreſs, is incapable of availing himſelf of his artifice even when it had attained its purpoſe; he repents, and gives his generoſity its free courſe, regardleſs of danger whilſt honour directs his actions. Between theſe different characters ſtands the unhappy Philoctetes, the object of our pity and our wonder. An outcaſt from human converſe, left for ten years in a deſolate cave, unprovided with the neceſſaries of life, and tortured with his wound, we expect that his mind had contracted a ferociouſneſs correſpondent to the wildneſs of his figure. Amidſt all his miſeries he receives the ſtrangers with courteſy; no miſanthropy has ſoured his temper; once more to ſee the

Grecian

Grecian dreſs, once more to hear the language of his country, was highly pleaſing to him; but to find himſelf addreſſed by the ſon of Achilles filled his ſoul with a tranſport of joy; ſincere, warm, and unſuſpecting, he falls into the ſnares laid for him; as ſoon as he perceives this, he breaks forth into the fierceſt paſſions; then, ſenſible of his helpleſs condition, he becomes a ſuppliant; conſcious of his worth, and indignant at the wrongs which he had received, he again pours forth the torrent of his rage; unmoved by the generoſity of Neoptolemus, and deaf to his perſuaſions, his mind, though a little ſoftened, remains inexorable.

The ſcene on this wild and rocky ſhore has ſuch a connexion with the diſtreſſes of Philoctetes, and is ſo finely deſcribed in many parts of the drama, that any obſervations here on ſo ſingular a beauty would be ill-placed and improper.

Persons of the Drama.

ULYSSES.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

PHILOCTETES.

HERCULES.

ATTENDANTS.

CHORUS OF MARINERS.

PHILOCTETES.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS.

ULYSSES.

THIS is the ſhore of Lemnos, ſea-girt iſle;
No human footſtep marks the ground: no hut,
Which man inhabits, riſes to the eye:
Here, Neoptolemus, thou noble ſon
Of the moſt valiant of the Grecian Chiefs,
The Melian Philoctetes I expoſed
In times long paſt, commanded by the kings
To do this deed; for from his wounded foot
A rankling ulcer oozed, and undiſturb'd
Nor victim nor libation could our hands
Preſent; through all the camp his diſmal groans
And horrid cries reſounded. But theſe things
Why ſhould I now relate? This is no time
For long diſcourſe, leſt, my arrival known,

I fruſtrate all my ſubtle trains, in which
I think to take him ſoon. Thine now the taſk
To act as I direct thee, and obſerve
If here the pierced rock to the winter's ſun
Preſents on either ſide a chearful ſeat;
But in the ſummer through the pervious cleft
The gently-paſſing gale leads ſleep along.
A little lower, on the left, perchance
A fountain thou may'ſt ſee, of whoſe pure ſtream,
If living yet, he drinks: with ſilent ſtep
Advance, and tell me in that place if ſtill
He holds his habitation, or elſewhere.
Further inſtructions then thou may'ſt receive,
And I may give them: mutual be our toil.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Not diſtant, king Ulyſſes, lies this taſk;
I think I ſee the cave by thee deſcribed.

ULYSSES.

Above this place, or lower down? My eye
Diſcerns it not.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Above; and many a trace
Of human ſteps.

L. 32. Καὶ ῥίζαν γ' ὁδὸς τύπος. v. 29. Legi malim ὀυχ ὁς, et veſtigii non una nota, ſed plurimæ.—Apud Heathium. As this cave had been the reſidence of Philoctetes for many years, it cannot be ſuppoſed that no mark of his footſteps was to be ſeen near it. At verſe 48 Neoptolemus ſays φυλάξεται ῥίζος: again at v. 164 he ſays Στίβου ὀγμεύει τόνδε. Hence the reading of Mr. Heath's learned friend is well ſupported.

ULYSSES.

ULYSSES.

Obſerve if ſtretch'd in ſleep

Haply he lie repoſed.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I view it round,

And not an human habitant is there.

ULYSSES.

Contains it nothing which domeſtic uſe

Requires?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

An heap of leaves, that bear the mark

Of one who lodges on them.

ULYSSES.

Nothing more,

Save this rude bed, beneath the rocky roof?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

A cup of wood by ſome rude artiſt wrought;

And *theſe, the ſparks of ſleeping fire to wake.

ULYSSES.

His treaſures, and to him of moment theſe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And drying here ſome noiſome rags are laid,

Alas, alas, how full of putrid gore!

ULYSSES.

Theſe mark his habitation in this place;

Nor diſtant he; th' immedicable wound

* Δικτικῶς.

Long

Long rankling in his foot forbids him far
To roam; in ſearch of food, or of ſome leaf,
He is gone forth; he knows perchance ſome herb
Lenient of pain. Be this attendant then
Sent to obſerve his ſteps, leſt unawares
He light on me; for more than all the ſons
Of Greece he wiſhes me within his pow'r.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He goes; the path ſhall well be watch'd. Now ſay,
Reſuming thy diſcourſe, what wou'dſt thou more?

ULYSSES.

Son of Achilles, in th' important cauſe,
Which brought thee hither, it behoves thee much
Thy vigour to exert; nor that alone,
But if aught new, if aught unheard before
Thou hear, aſſiſt; for therefore art thou come.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What then wou'dſt thou command me?

ULYSSES.

To allure
With fraudful words the unſuſpecting heart
Of Philoctetes: when he aſks thee who
And whence thou art, tell him thou art the ſon
Of great Achilles; fraud were uſeleſs here;
To Scyros ſay thy veſſel ploughs the main,
And bears thee from th' aſſociate Chiefs of Greece,
Indignant at thy wrongs; for when their pray'rs

Won thee to join their naval force (that hope
To ſtorm the tow'rs of Troy alone remain'd)
To thy requeſt, though highly juſt, with ſcorn
The armour of Achilles they denied,
And gave it to Ulyſſes: then of me
Say what thou wilt, the vileſt of vile things,
I heed it not. This taſk if thou decline,
Each Argive heart with ſorrow thou wilt wound.
For ſhould theſe fated arrows not be gain'd
It is not thine to waſte the Dardan realms.
By me no converſe with him can be held,
To thee it has no danger; it was thine
To join their arms, by oath to none engaged,
Nor through neceſſity, nor with the firſt
That ſtretch'd their ſails: all this in me offends.
My ruin then, if whilſt he holds this bow
He find me, is moſt certain; and on thee
My preſence will draw ruin: this requires
Deep-thoughted ſtratagem, and artful trains,
By ſtealth to bear th' unconquer'd arms away.
I know thy noble nature; it diſdains
To ſpeak a falſehood, or contrive a fraud:
But high the tranſport to obtain the prize
Of conqueſt: dare th' attempt: we will be juſt

L. 81. This oath is related at large by Euripides, Iphigen. at Aulis, L. 55. All, who engaged in this war under the obligation of this oath, or compelled by the confederate princes, that is, all, who at firſt embarked with Agamemnon and Menelaus, were conſidered by Philoctetes as his enemies, in a conſpiracy to expoſe him on that deſert iſland. Neoptolemus was not of that number; he therefore had not offended the deſerted Chief.

Hereafter:

Hereafter: ſome ſmall portion of this day
Forget to bluſh, and give thy ſelf to me:
Thenceforth be deem'd the holieſt of mankind.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What but to hear is painful to my ſoul,
Son of Laertes, I abhor to act.
My nature was not form'd for treacherous deeds,
Nor his who gave me birth; ſo fame reports.
Thou ſeeſt me prompt to ſeize this man by force,
But not by fraud: nor will his might avail,
Propt on one foot, againſt our vigorous ſtrength.
Sent thy aſſiſtant, I diſdain the name
Of a betrayer. I have a joy, O king,
In honeſt actions, though their efforts fail,
More than in victory by baſeneſs gain'd.

ULYSSES.

Thou noble ſon of an illuſtrious ſire,
When I was young I bade my tongue be ſtill,
And my hands active; now by certain proof
From long experience in the world I find
The tongue, not actions, rules th' affairs of men.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What then wou'dſt thou command, ſo that my tongue
Speak no untruth?

ULYSSES.

I tell thee that by fraud
Thou muſt take Philoctetes.

NEOPTO-

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why by fraud,
Rather than fair perſuaſion, ſhould I hence
Aſſay to lead him?

ULYSSES.

To perſuaſion's voice
He would be deaf, nor will thy force avail
To ſeize him.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What hath he of power ſo vaſt,
So terrible?

ULYSSES.

Unerring arrows wing'd
With certain death.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Bold then muſt be th' attempt
E'en to accoſt him.

ULYSSES.

Not if ſeized by fraud
As I adviſe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Doſt thou not deem it baſe
To utter falſehoods?

ULYSSES.

Not if falſehood leads
To ſafety.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How muſt that man look, who dares
To ſpeak ſuch things?

ULYSSES.

When much may be obtain'd
Such niceneſs may be waved.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To me what gain,
Should he to Troy ſail with us?

ULYSSES.

By his ſhafts
Alone is Troy ſubdued.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Did you not ſay
My arms ſhould raze her tow'rs?

ULYSSES.

Not without theſe,
Nor theſe unaided by thy arms.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If thus
It be decreed, theſe arrows muſt be won.

ULYSSES.

Win them, a double meed is thine.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What meed?
This known, no more I may refuſe to act.

ULYSSES.

As wiſe and brave to hear thy ſelf renown'd.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Go: I will do it, and all ſhame defy.

ULYSSES.

Are my inſtructions in thy mind well fix'd?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Be ſure of that, ſince I aſſent to them.

ULYSSES.

Abide thou here expecting his return:
I now muſt leave thee, to avoid his ſight,
And the attendant, who obſerves his ſteps,
Will order to the bark. If your delay
Exceeds my expectation, I will ſend
The ſame man back in ſuch habiliments
As to appear the maſter of ſome bark,
That he may come not known in ſuch a garb:
Artful and various thou wilt find his words;
But gather from them to the preſent cauſe
What is of higheſt import: to the ſhip
I go, theſe things committing to thy charge.
May Hermes, god of wiles, who led us forth,
Be now our guide, and the victorious queen,
Pallas, protectreſs of the rampired town,
Who always ſhields me with her guardian care!

NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

In a ſtrange land a ſtranger, potent lord,

What truths muſt I conceal, what may I ſpeak,
When to our ſight this man preſents himſelf?
Inſtruct me, for in knowlege he excells
All others, and in prudence, who from Jove
Receives the ſacred ſceptre; all this pow'r
To thee, my ſon, is from a noble line
Of anceſtors derived. Inform me then
What ſervice from my hand is now required.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Now, if thou haſt a wiſh to ſee the place
Through all its deep receſſes where he lies,
With freedom view it; but when he returns,
The painful traveller, quit theſe caves, be near
My hand, prepared to act as need requires.

CHORUS.

That was my purpoſe, with attentive heed
On thine, O king, to fix my eye. Now ſhow
Amidſt what caves he lodges, and what place
Inhabits: this to know is not unmeet,
Leſt haply he ſurprize me in ſome part
Where not expected. Show me then his cave,
Show me his reſidence; his footſteps mark,
Homeward impreſs'd, or pointed from the cave.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thou ſeeſt his habitation in this cave,
Where the cleft rock a double entrance yields.

CHORUS.

Where abſent is the wretched dweller now?

NEOPTO-

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The want of food hath doubtleſs drawn him forth
To toil with painful ſtep, not diſtant far.
For he ſuſtains his miſerable life
By miſerably piercing with his ſhafts
The beaſts that haunt theſe wilds; nor for his wound
Finds he a cure, or to his pains relief.

CHORUS.

I pity him, no mortal's lenient aid
Tending around him, and no ſocial friend
Near him to ſooth his ſolitary hours.
Alone, and with the anguiſh of his wound
For ever tortured, while each chearleſs want
Daily ſcowls round him, how ſupports he life?
Alas, to what hard toils are mortal men
Reduced, whoſe lives, unhappy ſufferers, want
What to ſuſtain them! So this man, perchance
In noble blood and high-traced anceſtry
Rank'd with the greateſt, deſtitute of all
That life requires, alone 'midſt ſhaggy beaſts
And birds of various wing his lodging finds;
And pierced with pain and hunger here endures
Immedicable anguiſh, whilſt around
The rock's rude Echo with unceaſing voice
In ſullen notes returns his diſmal groans.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

My wonder this excites not; for heav'n-ſent

Theſe ſufferings ſeized him, if aright I judge,
Derived from baleful Chryſe; and the toils
Which now afflict him, where no friend is near
To mitigate his ills, are by the gods
Aſſign'd, who would not their unconquer'd ſhafts
He wing againſt the Trojans, ere the time
Arrive, when by them Troy muſt be ſubdued.

CHORUS.

Silence, my ſon; I hear a ſound; it ſeems
The voice of one acquainted long with pain.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

From what part comes the ſound? I hear it now:
This is indeed the voice of one that ſets
His ſteps with pain: though diſtant, yet diſtinct
Is this heart-waſting voice, for loud his groans.

CHORUS.

Now ſummon all thy prudence, for his ſteps
Approach, are near; no charm of tuneful pipe
He brings like rural ſhepherd, but loud cries
Far diſtant heard, through anguiſh when his foot
The rugged path annoys; or as he ſees
Our veſſel in th' inhoſpitable port:
For dreadful are his cries before him ſent.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES.

Strangers, who are you that have ſteer'd your bark

To

To this rude coaſt, which knows not friendly port,
Nor habitation? What your country ſay;
Of what race may I ſpeak you? for your garb
Preſents the modes of Greece, to me moſt dear.
I wiſh to hear your voice. Nay, do not look
With fear and horror at this ſavage form,
But pity me, a poor forſaken wretch,
Alone, and friendleſs, and oppreſs'd with ills.
Speak to me, if you come as friends, Oh ſpeak;
This I ſhould not refuſe; refuſe not you.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Stranger, be firſt inform'd of this, for this
Was thy firſt wiſh to know, we are of Greece.

PHILOCTETES.

O welcome accents! What a joy to hear
That language, to its ſound ſo long diſuſed!
Who brought thee hither? What neceſſity,
What ſtrong deſire impell'd thy ſails, what wind
To me moſt dear? Speak to me, tell me all,
That who thou art undoubting I may know.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

My birth I draw from Scyros, ſea-girt iſle,
Thither my bark now ſteers its homeward courſe;
And Neoptolemus men call my name,
Son of Achilles. I have told thee all.

PHILOCTETES.

Son of a father to my ſoul moſt dear,
Thou native of a land I love, thou joy

Of

Of aged Lycomedes, to theſe ſhores
On what atchievement bound? Whence ſail'd thy bark?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

From Ilium now I ſteer my willing courſe.

PHILOCTETES.

What ſay'ſt thou? Not with us didſt thou embark,
When firſt 'gainſt Ilium ſail'd our warlike hoſt.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Hadſt thou too in that martial toil a ſhare?

PHILOCTETES.

Know'ſt thou not me, my ſon, whom now thou ſeeſt?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How ſhould I know a man not ſeen before?

PHILOCTETES.

Hath not my name, hath not the bruit of ills
By which I periſh, ever reach'd thine ear?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nothing of theſe thy queſtions do I know.

PHILOCTETES.

Oh what a wretch am I, and to the gods
How hateful, that no tidings of my woes
Have reach'd my houſe, nor any realm of Greece!
While they whoſe impious arts expoſed me here,
Deride me, and conceal the barbarous deed,
My wound ſtill rankling, and my pains more fierce.

L. 248. Lycomedes, king of Scyros, was father of Deidamia the mother of Neoptolemus. See the Achilleid of Statius.

Know

Know then, thou ſon of an illuſtrious ſire,
Son of Achilles, I am he, whoſe name
Widely divulged perchance hath reach'd thine ears,
Lord of the arms of Hercules, the ſon'
Of Pœas, Philoctetes; whom the Chiefs,
And Cephallene's king, here baſely left
An outcaſt, and alone, with dire diſeaſe
Conſumed, and tortured with this gnawing wound
By the fell ſerpent's venom'd tooth impreſs'd.
In this ill plight they left me here alone,
From Chryſe when on this wild coaſt we touch'd.
As wearied with the toſſing of the waves
They ſaw me ſleeping on the ſhore, beneath
This rock's rude covering, with malignant joy
They left me, and ſail'd hence, a few mean rags,
Meet for a wretch like me, beſide me laid,
And food, a ſcanty pittance; ſuch be theirs!
Think from that ſleep, my ſon, how I awoke
When they were gone; think on my tears, my groans,
Such ills lamenting, when I ſaw my ſhips,
With which I hither ſail'd, all out at ſea,
And ſteering hence; no mortal in the place,
Not one to ſuccour me, not one to lend
His lenient hand to mitigate my wound.
On every ſide I roll'd my eyes, and ſaw
Nothing but wretchedneſs; of that enough.
Time after time roll'd on; this narrow cave
I made my manſion, and theſe hands alone

Supplied my wants; my bow procured me food,
Piercing the doves on wing; beneath my ſhafts
Whene'er they fell, I trail'd my foot along
In anguiſh; ſo when thirſt compell'd me forth,
Or the inclement winter's piercing froſt
To break a few dry ſticks, out crawl'd this wretch
Deviſing ſhifts: fire was not here; I ſtruck
Flint againſt flint, and raiſed the latent ſparks
With pain: thus cheriſh'd life hath been preſerved.
This ſheltering manſion, with ſuch chearing fire,
Hath furniſh'd me with all things, but a cure
To my diſeaſe. Now learn from me the ſtate
Of this rude iſle: no mariner through choice
Adventures on this coaſt; for no ſafe port,
Receives his bark, no mart is open here
For traffic, and no hoſpitable door
To give him welcome; to theſe ſhores his courſe
No wiſe man ſteers; ſome in a length of time,
Which rolls along events ſurpaſſing thought,
Have been driv'n hither; theſe, my ſon, when here,
In words have pitied me; nay, they have giv'n,
Touch'd with compaſſion, ſome ſmall ſhare of food,
Some rayment; but entreaties all were vain,
Not one, though oft I urged the fond requeſt,
Would bear me to my houſehold gods, and ſave
This life; the tenth ſad year now rolls its courſe,
Since here with wretchedneſs and famine pierced
I waſte away, and feed my rankling wound.

Theſe

Theſe wrongs from the Atridæ I ſuſtain,
And from Ulyſſes, whoſe unfeeling heart
Ne'er knew the touch of pity: on their heads
May the juſt gods pour miſeries great as mine!

CHORUS.

Like others, who have viſited this iſle,
I too, O ſon of Pœas, pity thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I can bear witneſs to thy words, by proof
I know them true: Ulyſſes I have found
Unfeeling, and the ſons of Atreus baſe.

PHILOCTETES.

Haſt thou too ſuffer'd from them? Is thy rage
'Gainſt their deſtructive guilt, like mine, enflamed?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Oh that my hand had pow'r t' avenge my wrongs!
Then ſhould Mycenæ and proud Sparta know
And feel that Scyros to the brave gives birth.

PHILOCTETES.

This ſhows a noble ſpirit: but, my ſon,
What mighty wrongs to Lemnos urged thy ſails?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I will inform thee, if my ſoul can bear
To ſpeak my wrongs; for ſince Achilles died——

PHILOCTETES.

Ah, let me check thy ſpeech: of this event
Firſt tell me. Is the ſon of Peleus dead?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And by no mortal hand, but by the bow
Of Phœbus, ſuch the voice of fame, ſubdued.

PHILOCTETES.

Illuſtrious he that ſlew, and he that fell!
But what behoves me now? Should I firſt aſk
What thou haſt ſuffer'd, or lament his fate?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Griefs of thy own, I think thou haſt enough,
Unhappy man, unmix'd with foreign ills.

PHILOCTETES.

Thy words are wiſe: return then to thy tale,
My ſon, and ſay what wrongs thou haſt received.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In a tall bark with all her ſails unfurl'd
The great Ulyſſes, and the ſage who train'd
My father's youth, came to me, and declared
(The truth yet doubtful) that, my father dead,
No arm but mine could raze the tow'rs of Troy.
I heard them, nor detain'd them long, but ſoon
Mounted the bark; for ardent my deſire
To ſee the dead, whom I had never ſeen,
Ere in the earth entomb'd: their plea beſides
Had honour in it, that the tow'rs of Troy
Should, if I join'd them, fall beneath my arm.
One day our veſſel plough'd the foaming main,
And on the ſecond with a favouring gale

I reach'd

I reach'd Sigæum, ſcene of bitter woe.
Soon as I landed, all the army round
Encloſing me with ſalutations greet,
And ſwear they ſee Achilles, now no more,
Living again; but he was ſtretch'd in death.
O'er him in all the anguiſh of my grief
I ſhed the pious tear; nor mourn'd him long,
But haſted to th' Atridæ, as my friends,
For ſuch I deem'd them, and my father's arms
Demanded, and beſides whate'er was his.
In words that pierced my heart they thus replied,
Son of Achilles, thine be all the ſtores,
The treaſures of thy father, ſave his arms;
Of theſe another now is lord, the ſon
Of old Laertes. Strait the ſwelling tear
Burſt from my eye; and rouſed to ardent rage
Indignant I replied, Have you then dared,
Injurious men, to give my arms away,
My leave not aſk'd? Ulyſſes, who was nigh,
Addreſs'd me thus, To me, young man, theſe arms
With juſtice they have giv'n, for from the foe
I ſaved them, and their ſlaughter'd lord. Incenſed
I pour'd a torrent of reproachful words
Againſt him, ſhould he bear my arms away.

L. 384. Me miſerum, quanto cogor meminiſſe dolore
Temporis illius, quo Graiûm murus Achilles
Procubuit! Nec me lachrymæ, luctuſve, timorve
Tardarunt, quin corpus humo ſublime referrem.
His humeris, his, inquam, humeris ego corpus Achillis,
Et ſimul arma tuli.—Ovid. Met. Lib. XIII.

Stung

Stung with my words, though train'd to curb his rage,
Thus far to riſing paſſion he gave way,
Thou waſt not where we were, but diſtant far
From danger and from glory: but theſe arms,
Since in ſo high a ſtrain thy tongue breaks looſe,
To Scyros ſailing never ſhalt thou bear.
Thus ſlighted, thus inſulted, of my right
Robb'd by the vile Ulyſſes, of a race
As vile deſcended, I to Scyros ſteer
My homeward courſe; yet leſs with him enraged
Than with the potent kings; for every ſtate,
And every army from their Chiefs are form'd.
And they, who mock at honour's dictates, learn
Their baſeneſs from their lords. Thou haſt heard all:
But know, whoe'er the ſons of Atreus hates,
Muſt be to me, and to the gods, moſt dear.

CHORUS.

Thou all-ſuſtaining parent, mighty queen,
Delighting in the mountain's wood-crown'd height,
Mother of Jove, who feed'ſt the golden ſtream
Of rich Pactolus, pow'r revered, to thee
My vows I then addreſs'd, when all theſe wrongs
Burſt from the ſons of Atreus, when they gave
His father's arms (O thou, whoſe car ſublime,
Bleſt as thou art, bull-rending lions draw!)
To grace Ulyſſes, an illuſtrious prize.

PHILOCTETES.

With marks of grief imprinted deep, I ween,

Strangers, to me you ſteer'd your courſe, with mine
Your voice according; for, with me, the ſons
Of Atreus, and Ulyſſes you have felt:
Theſe are their deeds: I know him well; his tongue
To ſubtile blandiſhment and wicked guile
Is always ſmooth'd, whence nothing juſt was e'er
Brought to effect. I marvel not at this,
But much, if this the greater Ajax ſaw,
How his high ſoul ſuch deeds of baſeneſs brook'd.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He, ſtranger, was no more; for had he lived,
I had not of my arms been plunder'd thus.

PHILOCTETES.

Dead, ſay'ſt thou? Is the noble Ajax dead?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

No more he views the ſun's ætherial light.

PHILOCTETES.

I mourn his fate. But tell me lives the ſon
Of Tydeus? Lives that wretch, who ere his birth
By Siſyphus was to Laertes ſold?
Are not they dead? Such wretches ſhould not live.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

No; be thou well aſſured of that: they live,
And flouriſh now amidſt the Argive hoſt.

L. 427. This dark ſcandal is differently related. Laertes is ſaid to have carried off Anticlea the wife of Siſyphus when ſhe was pregnant with Ulyſſes, and to have made compenſation to the injured huſband with large treaſures.

PHILOC-

PHILOCTETES.

Where is my honour'd, good, and aged friend,
The Pylian Neſtor? Well his ſage advice
The baſeneſs of their actions might have curb'd.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He lives indeed, but ſinks beneath his grief,
Mourning Antilochus, his loved, loſt ſon.

PHILOCTETES.

Twice have thy words with ſorrow pierced my heart,
To hear, what leaſt I wiſh'd to hear, the death
Of two brave friends. Ah, what muſt be our thought,
When ſuch men periſh, and Ulyſſes lives,
Whoſe death, inſtead of theirs, ſhould be announced!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He is a wary combatant; but craft
Is oft entangled in the nets it ſpreads.

PHILOCTETES.

Now, by the gods inform me where was then
Patroclus, to thy father once moſt dear?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He too was dead. In one brief ſentence hear
This truth, that never willingly doth war
Cut off the baſe, and never ſpares the brave.

PHILOCTETES.

To ſhow thee that my thoughts accord with thine,
Now let me aſk thee of a worthleſs man,
But paſſing ſhrewd, and voluble of tongue.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Of other than Ulyſſes doſt thou ſpeak?

PHILOCTETES.

I meant not him: but in the Grecian camp
Was one Therſites, who wiſh'd oft to ſpeak
What no man would hear once: is he alive?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I ſaw him not, but heard that yet he lives.

PHILOCTETES.

Yes, he will live; for never have I known
That the baſe periſh; ſuch the gods protect,
Delighting from the realms of death to ſnatch
The crafty and the guileful; but the juſt
And generous they in ruin always ſink.
How for theſe things ſhall we account, or how
Approve them? When I find the gods unjuſt,
How can I praiſe their heavenly governance?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Son of Oetæan Pœas, I will guard
My future life from Ilium diſtant far,
Far from the ſons of Atreus. O'er the brave
Where the vile lords it, and illuſtrious worth
Is doom'd to periſh by oppreſſive pow'r,
I with ſuch men will never live a friend.
But me the rocks of Scyros ſhall henceforth
Content, not undelighted with my home.
Now to my bark I go: farewell, thou ſon

Of Pœas; be each bleſſing thine, farewell;
May the gods heal thy wound! We muſt go hence,
That when the gale ſprings favouring we may ſail.

PHILOCTETES.

Would you now ſpread your ſails, my ſon?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The time
Now calls us near the bark to watch the gale.

PHILOCTETES.

Now by thy father's honour'd ſhade, my ſon,
And by thy mother, by whate'er thy houſe
Holds dear to thee, thy ſuppliant I implore
Thy pity, do not leave me thus alone,
Abandon'd in theſe ills, which now thou ſeeſt,
And with which thou haſt heard I long have had
My dwelling here. Receive me in thy bark,
Allow me there a place; this freight, I know,
Will be offenſive; yet diſdain it not.
Whate'er is baſe the noble mind abhors,
But glories in the kind and generous deed.
Not to perform this kindneſs were reproach
To thee, and ſhame; but granting my requeſt,
High honour waits thee. If I reach alive
The land of Oeta, I ſhall burden thee
Not one whole day; refuſe not my requeſt;
Throw me where'er thou wilt, into the hold,
The prow, the ſtern, where leaſt I may annoy

The mariners: aſſent, my ſon, by Jove
Protector of the ſuppliant, grant my pray'r.
Infirm, and lame, and wretched as I am,
Low at thy knees I fall; forſake me not:
Far from the haunt of men abandon'd thus;
But ſave me, bear me to thy friendly ſhore,
Or to Chalcodon's ports that deep indent
Eubœa; thence the paſſage is not long
To Oeta, and to Trachin's rocky heights,
And to Sperchius, beauteous-rolling ſtream.
Show me to my loved father; yet long ſince
The tomb, I fear, received him; for to thoſe,
Who reach'd this coaſt, I oft gave charge, and oft
Sent my requeſt that he would ſpeed a bark
To bear me hence in ſafety to my home.
But he is dead, or they perchance (for this
Might be expected) on whoſe promiſed aid
I built my hopes, of my diſaſtrous ſtate
Made ſmall account, and ſteer'd their onward courſe
To their own ports. But now I come to thee
To bear my meſſage, nay, to bear me hence.
Save me, have pity on me; for thou ſeeſt
The dangers, and the horrible events
Attending mortals, proſperous now, anon
In miſery ſunk. Behoves it then the man,
A ſtranger now to ills, on ills to come
Forward to look; then moſt when fortune ſmiles,

To have a ſenſe of man's uncertain ſtate,
Leſt ruin ſteal upon him, and he fall.

CHORUS.

Have pity on him, king; for he hath told
Of hard encounters with ſevereſt toils
Beyond man's ſufferance: ne'er may one I love
Endure the like! And if, O king, thou hate
The ſtern Atridæ, I would turn their ill
To his great good; and ſince his wiſh is urged
So ſtrongly, in my ſwift well-furniſh'd bark
Convey him to his manſion, and avoid
The righteous vengeance of th' offended gods.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Take heed leſt now too gentle be thy mind,
But when, embark'd together, his diſeaſe
Long time annoys thee, other be thy thoughts.

CHORUS.

Never, oh never: nor ſhalt thou have cauſe
To charge my ſtedfaſt mind with ſuch reproach.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay, I ſhould bluſh indeed, ſhould I appear
Leſs prompt than thou with generous toil to aid
In his diſtreſs a ſtranger. We will ſail,
If ſuch thy judgement: let him come with ſpeed;
My bark ſhall bear him hence, nor ſhall he find
Denial: may the gods direct our courſe
Safe to the ſhore on which we wiſh to land!

L. 546. There is a deſigned ambiguity here, as well as in the ſpeech of the Chorus at l. 533. Neoptolemus means no other than the Sigæan ſhore.

PHILOC-

PHILOCTETES.

O welcome day! Moſt courteous thou of men!
And you, ye friendly mariners, what thanks
Can I return you? With what words expreſs
The gratitude that glows within my heart?
But let us go, my ſon, and pay within
A farewell greeting to this chearleſs cave,
Dwelling unmeet for man; that thou may'ſt know
Where I have lived, and what I have ſuſtain'd
With a firm heart: the ſight alone, I think,
Horror on others muſt impreſs; but me
Neceſſity hath taught to love e'en this.

CHORUS.

Reſtrain your ſteps awhile: two men advance,
One to thy bark belongs, a ſtranger one.
Firſt hear their tidings; viſit then the cave.

MERCHANT, MARINER, NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

MERCHANT.

Son of Achilles, to this mariner,
Who with two others guarded thy tall bark,
I made requeſt that he would ſhow me where
Thou might'ſt be found; ſince thus I light on thee
Where leaſt expected, driv'n by chance to land

L. 559. This ſtranger, this pretended Merchant of Peparethus, is the attendant whom Ulyſſes had promiſed to ſend back habited as the maſter of ſome bark, l. 143. His tale is artful indeed.

On

On the ſame ſhore; for I, as maſter, ſteer'd
My little galley homeward from the coaſt
Of Troy to Peparethus cloath'd with vines
Rich with the purple grape. But when I heard
That all thy naval train was waiting here,
I deem'd it meet in ſilence not to ſail,
But firſt to tell thee things perchance to thee
Unknown, and much importing thee to know;
What late reſolves the Grecian Chiefs have form'd
Againſt thee; not reſolves alone, but acts
With vigour and without delay enforced.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In grateful memory, ſtranger, I ſhall hold
Thy kind concern for me, elſe I were baſe.
What thou haſt hinted ſpeak at large, 'gainſt me
The counſils by the Grecians lately form'd.

MERCHANT.

The ſons of Theſeus, and the aged Chief,
Phœnix, purſue thee with a well-arm'd fleet.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

By force to lead me back, or ſuaſive words?

MERCHANT.

I know not: what I heard I came to ſpeak.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Doth Phœnix this, and they who with him ſail,
Obſequious to th' Atridæ's royal will?

L. 568. Peparethus is a little iſland not far from Lemnos.

MERCHANT.

MERCHANT.

Be thou assured they speed without delay.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Whence is it that Ulysses came not, prompt
To sail with them? Hath fear restrain'd his zeal?

MERCHANT.

He and the son of Tydeus, when I sail'd,
Against some other plough'd the foaming main.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

On what adventure was Ulysses bound?

MERCHANT.

There was a man——But tell me, who is this?
I would first know: but speak it not aloud.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

This, friend, is Philoctetes the renown'd.

MERCHANT.

Nay then no further question: with all speed
Hoist every sail, and hie thee from this land.

PHILOCTETES.

What says this merchant? What design, my son,
'Gainst me conveys that whisper to thy ear?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What he would say I know not; let him speak
Clear and aloud to thee, and me, and these.

MERCHANT.

Son of Achilles, to the Grecian host
Betray me not, as what I should conceal

Disclosing;

Diſcloſing; many favours at their hands
Have I received for ſervices by me
To them perform'd, ſuch as a poor man may.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I hate the ſons of Atreus; and this man,
Becauſe he hates them, is my deareſt friend.
Behoves thee, ſince to me thou comeſt a friend,
Nought, which a friend can tell us, to conceal.

MERCHANT.

See what thou doſt.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

That long hath been my care.

MERCHANT.

On thee I charge the blame.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Charge it, but ſpeak.

MERCHANT.

Then I will ſpeak. Againſt this man the ſon
Of Tydeus, and the ſtern Ulyſſes ſpeed
Their ſails; their purpoſe ratified by oath
By ſoft perſuaſion or compulſive force
To bring him back: this all the Grecians heard
Ulyſſes ſpeak aloud; for bolder hope
Was his, and firm aſſurance of ſucceſs.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

After ſuch length of time what cauſe hath moved
The ſons of Atreus to ſuch anxious care

For

For one, an outcaſt, whom ſo long they left?
Whence this deſire? Or have the gods by force
Impell'd them, thus avenging impious deeds?

MERCHANT.

Of this I will inform thee, things perchance
By thee not heard. There was a noble Seer,
The ſon of Priam, Helenus his name;
Him this dark plotter curſed by every tongue,
As in the night he prowling roved alone,
Ulyſſes ſeized, and brought his glorious prize
Bound to the Grecians: all the dark decrees
Of fate he open'd to them, and declared
That never ſhould they raze the tow'rs of Troy,
Till by perſuaſion they ſhould lead this man
From his lone dwelling in this rocky iſle.
This when Ulyſſes heard the ſeer declare,
Inſtant he pledged his faith to lead him hence,
And ſhow him to the Grecian camp: his hopes
Are warm to win his willing mind; if not,
He will recur to force; and for ſucceſs
Hath pledged his head. Thou haſt heard all: now haſte,
Thou and whoe'er is dear to thee: be warn'd.

PHILOCTETES.

What, hath this vile accurs'd deceiver ſworn
To ſhow me to the Grecians? Were I dead,
Then might perſuaſion bring me from the realms
Of Pluto, like his father, back to light.

MERCHANT.

L. 646. Siſyphus, when dying, charged his wife not to bury him; the lady obeyed his commands.

MERCHANT.

I know not that. My bark demands me now.
May the beſt bleſſings of the gods be yours.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES.

Is not this ſtrange? What, dares Ulyſſes hope
With ſoothing words to win me to embark
With him, and trail me through the Grecian camp
A ſpectacle! No: rather would I hear
The ſerpent, from whoſe venom'd tooth my foot
Received this wound. But he dares ſpeak and act
Whate'er is baſe. I know that he will come;
Let us then hence; with all its broad expanſe
Let the ſea roll between his bark and us.
Let us begone: for well-timed ſpeed (the toil
Surmounted) brings the calm of ſweet repoſe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

When from the ſhore the favouring gales ariſe,
Our ſails ſhall catch them: they are adverſe now.

PHILOCTETES.

Fair is each gale that wafts the bark from ills.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

No: but to them the gale is adverſe too.

commands. In the infernal regions he accuſed her to Pluto as denying him funeral rites, and requeſted permiſſion to return to life for one day to puniſh her for this impiety: the monarch of the dead was perſuaded to grant his requeſt. He returned to life, but perfidiouſly refuſed to deſcend again to the realms beneath. Scholiaſt.

PHILOCTETES.

To daring pirates adverſe is no wind,
With ruffian force when they can ſeize their ſpoil.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Well; inſtant let us ſail: but from thy cave
Firſt bear what thou may'ſt need, or wiſh to take.

PHILOCTETES.

There is, though ſmall my ſtores, what I ſhall need.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What is there which my bark can not ſupply?

PHILOCTETES.

There is an herb, with which I oft aſſuage
My wound, and wholly mitigate its pain.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Bring it. Aught elſe haſt thou a wiſh to take?

PHILOCTETES.

If of theſe ſhafts one careleſsly be dropt,
I would not leave it to a caſual lord.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Is this the bow ſo famous through the world?

PHILOCTETES.

It is: my hands no other deign to hold.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wilt thou indulge me with a nearer view,
To hold, to kiſs it as a thing divine?

PHILOCTETES.

This, and what elſe is mine, to thee, my ſon,
To gratify thy wiſh ſhall be allow'd.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I wiſh it, ſo far wiſh it as thy will
Aſſents; if not, my wiſh ſhall be ſuppreſs'd.

PHILOCTETES.

Thy words are pious; thou haſt my conſent,
Thou, who alone haſt giv'n me to behold
The ſun's bright beams, to ſee th' Otæan land,
My aged father, my loved friends; when ſunk
Beneath my foes, to riſe and triumph. Yes,
Thou haſt my leave to touch it, to my hands
Again to give it, and to make thy boaſt
That for thy virtue thou of all mankind
Alone haſt handled it: for friendly deeds
It was my prize; nor envy I my friend
To ſee, to touch it. He, whoſe grateful heart
Knows to requite a favour, is a friend
Of higher value than rich treaſured ſtores.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The cave now enter.

PHILOCTETES.

I will lead thee on;
For my diſeaſe thy aiding hand deſires.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Such miſeries never did mine eyes behold;
But fame records from times of old
That when Ixion with ambitious love
Aſſay'd to ſtain the bed of Jove,
Seized by the Thunderer, on the whirling wheel
Enchain'd, ſuch tortures he was doom'd to feel.
Elſe not the grief-aſſaulted ear,
Nor eye inured to ſcenes of woe,
Have known a fate like his ſevere:
Yet juſtice aims no vengeful blow;
His hands no deed of baſeneſs ſtains,
And fraud his virtuous ſoul diſdains.
Alone, expoſed on this wild ſhore,
Hearing the billows round him roar,
I marvel how his mournful life he bore.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

In chearleſs ſolitude theſe rocks among
With pain he drag'd his ſteps along;
No ſocial friend, no partner in his pains
Attentive hears while he complains,
From mutual anguiſh makes his mutual moan,
Re-echoes ſigh for ſigh, and groan for groan:
None, when his fierce envenom'd wound
Burſts ope, and ſpouts the boiling gore,
To cull the lenient herb is found
From bounteous nature's balmy ſtore.

But

But (as a child, its nurſe away,
With tottering foot attempts to ſtray)
Where beſt his food he may provide
His feebly-rolling ſteps are tried,
Oft as his ſoul-conſuming pains ſubſide.

STROPHE 2.

Him not the earth's rich fruits ſuſtain,
Which from her ſacred bounty riſe;
Nor, food of men, the golden grain,
Which toil's inventive care ſupplies;
Nor aught, ſave birds that wing th' ætherial height,
If haply his ſwift ſhafts arreſt their flight.
For ten long years no ſparkling bowl
Chear'd with the grape's rich juice his ſoul;
But where th' unruffled fount he ſaw,
He haſted from the joyleſs ſtream to draw.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

A noble youth he now hath found,
Who with his father's virtues glows;
By fortune now his patience crown'd,
He riſes greater from his woes.
The bark ſhall waft him, after theſe ſad hours,
To thy loved banks, Sperchius, where their bow'rs
The Melian Nymphs delight to twine;
Where Oeta blazed with flames divine,
Whence glorious to the bleſt abodes
The hero roſe a god among the gods.

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, *returning from the cave*; CHORUS.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why this delay? Move onward. What the cauſe
Of this thy ſilence? Whence this deep diſmay?

Philoctetes groans.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What ill afflicts thee?

PHILOCTETES.

Nothing great; go on.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wou'dſt thou ſuppreſs the pain of thy diſeaſe?

PHILOCTETES.

Oh, no; I now feel lighter.——O ye gods!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why with ſuch groans doſt thou invoke the gods?

PHILOCTETES.

To ſave us with their kind and guardian pow'r.

He groans repeatedly.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What may this be? Wilt thou not ſpeak? Thus long
Why art thou ſilent? Piercing ſeems thy pain.

PHILOCTETES.

Oh, this exceeds the pow'r of man to bear!
Nor from you longer can I hide my ill.
Oh, I am pierced, pierced through! Unhappy me!

I cannot

I cannot bear theſe agonizing pains.

Repeated and violent groans.

Haſt thou a ſword, my ſon? Cut off my foot,
Quick, hew it off, nor ſpare this wretched life.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What are theſe new and ſudden ills, that cauſe
Such dreadful cries, and loud-lamenting groans?

PHILOCTETES.

Know'ſt thou, my ſon—

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Know what?

PHILOCTETES.

Know'ſt thou, my ſon—

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What wou'dſt thou aſk?

PHILOCTETES.

I know not.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How not know?

Philoctetes groans again.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How dreadful the attack of thy diſeaſe!

PHILOCTETES.

Dreadful indeed: words cannot ſpeak its force.
But pity me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What wou'dſt thou I ſhould do?

PHILOC-

PHILOCTETES.

Be not aſtoniſh'd, nor abandon me.
At intervals, like ruffians keen to ſeize
Their prey, its cruel inroads it will make
Till it be ſated.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

O unhappy man,
In all thy toils unhappy! Shall my hand
Support thee?

PHILOCTETES.

No: I would not that; but take
The bow, which lately thou didſt wiſh to touch,
And, till the pains, which pierce me now, abate,
Hold it, and guard it well; for when the force
Of this diſeaſe begins to be allay'd,
Sleep ſeizes me; till then I have no pauſe
From gnawing pain; permit me then to lie
In undiſturb'd repoſe; and, ſhould they come
Mean while, I beg thee by th' immortal gods
Let not perſuaſion, force, or all their arts
Work thee to yield it to them; for thy ſelf
And me thy ſuppliant elſe thou wilt deſtroy

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In my attentive care confide; to none,
Save to thy hands and mine, ſhall it be giv'n.
Conſign it to me: happy be the truſt!

PHILOCTETES.

Take it, my ſon; and be thy vows addreſs'd

To Envy, that to thee it cauſe not toils,
Such as to me, and to its former lord.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Grant this, ye gods! And may a favouring gale
Ariſe, and ſafely bear us to the land
Sought by our ſails, and by the gods aſſign'd!

PHILOCTETES.

Theſe vows, my ſon, I fear thou haſt addreſs'd
Without effect; for the black blood again
Spouts from the bottom of my wound; I dread
Anguiſh unknown before. Unhappy me,
What torture this! It thrills, it darts along;
It is not to be borne. You ſee my ſtate;
But fly not; leave me not abandon'd here.
Thou Cephallenian ſavage, might this pain
Pierce through thy breaſt, quite through! Ye brother kings,
Leaders of Greece, for ſuch a length of time,
For me ſuch anguiſh how had you ſuſtain'd?
O death, O death, each day ſo oft invoked,
Canſt thou ne'er come? My ſon, thou generous youth,
Oh take me, burn me in theſe whirling flames
Of Lemnos; which ſad office for the ſon
Of Jove theſe hands refuſed not to perform,
Theſe arms receiving as my meed. My ſon,
Why art thou ſilent? What employs thy thoughts?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Long have I grieved, and mourn'd thy painful ills.

PHILOCTETES.

Let not that ſhake thy firmneſs; for theſe pains
Oft come thus keen, and ſoon are gone again.
But, I entreat thee, leave me not alone.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Be confident; for thee we here will ſtay.

PHILOCTETES.

And will you ſtay?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Be thou aſſured we will.

PHILOCTETES.

Ill it becomes me to require thy oath.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To go without thee were an impious deed.

PHILOCTETES.

Give me thy hand to ratify thy faith.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I give it as a pledge that I will ſtay.

PHILOCTETES.

There, let me there——

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What ſay'ſt thou?

PHILOCTETES.

There on high——

NEOPTOLEMUS.

This is diſtraction. Wherefore are thine eyes
Fix'd on that orb above?

PHILOCTETES.

Off, let me go.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why ſhould I let thee go?

PHILOCTETES.

Unhand me, off.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I cannot quit thee in this hapleſs ſtate.

PHILOCTETES.

You kill me if you touch me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To thy ſelf

I leave thee.——Are thy ſpirits now more calm?

PHILOCTETES.

O earth, receive me dying as I lie;
My ills will never let me riſe again.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Sleep ſoon will ſteal upon him; ſee, his head
Already he reclines; and all his limbs
Are bath'd with ſweat; the black diſtended vein
Is burſt, and from his foot out-wells the gore.
Let us allow him then, my friends, to reſt
In quiet, ſoon as ſleep ſhall cloſe his eyes.

CHORUS.

O ſleep, that know'ſt not care, that know'ſt not pain,
Come gently-breathing, ſorrow-charming king:
Veil from his eyes this light, whoſe glaring beams

Unſhaded

Unſhaded now are ſpread: come, healing pow'r!—
The hour, my ſon, requires deliberate thought,
Thy purpoſe fix'd or changed: this is the hour
To charge us with thy mandates. What avails
Longer delay? Occaſion hath a pow'r
Surpaſſing all the counſils of the wiſe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

True, he hears nothing: but theſe arms in vain
We make our prize, without him if we fail;
For his the crown; he muſt be borne to Troy;
So will'd the god. How baſe to boaſt of deeds,
Which e'en with falſehood could not be atchieved!

CHORUS.

Theſe things, my ſon, the god will make his care.
But when to me thy mandates thou ſhalt give,
Low be thy voice; for ſleep in the diſeaſed
Is ever on the watch, nor ſeals the eyes.
What now is in thy pow'r with caution act,
And ſilence: if with *his* thy thoughts accord,
Thou know'ſt of whom I ſpeak, thou ſeeſt his ſtate,
Let prudence judge, unable to reſiſt.
The gale, my ſon, the favouring gale now breathes;
He ſees not, helpleſs as in night's dark hour
He lies, and ſleep, which all his ſenſes locks,
Aids the deſign; nor hand nor foot diſcharge
Their functions; but like one, for whom the tomb

L. 858. Ulyſſes is here meant; but the Chorus, diſtruſting the imperfect ſleep of the ſick man, ſpeaks only in dark hints; this obſcurity is intended.

Is open'd, ſee him ſtretch'd: this hath a voice
That calls us to the deed; to ſeize him now
Were eaſy; be the taſk to me aſſign'd:
Beſt is that toil on which no danger waits.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Be ſilent, I command thee; of ſuch thoughts
No more: he moves his eyes, and lifts his head.

PHILOCTETES.

O light, whoſe chearful beam my waking eyes
Reviſits, much beyond my thought, my hope,
Thou ſhow'ſt me with what faithful care my ſleep
Theſe ſtrangers guarded. Never, O my ſon,
Could my fond wiſh conceive that thou wou'dſt bear
With ſuch ſoft pity to attend my ills,
And give me aid. Not ſo our worthy Chiefs,
The ſons of Atreus; they diſdain'd to bear
So tenderly: but all theſe things, my ſon,
(For noble is thy nature, and thy veins
Are rich with noble blood) my cries, the ſtench
Of my foul wound, thou haſt eſteem'd as nought.
Now, in this pauſe, this reſpite from my pain,
Let thy hand help me, raiſe me from the ground;
That when this weakneſs leaves me, to the bark
Together we may go, nor ſtay thy ſails.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

With joy I ſee thee thus beyond my hope
Viewing the light, and breathing vital air,

Free

Free from thy pains; for, added to thoſe ills,
Thou hadſt the ſemblance of a man that breathes
No more. Now riſe; or theſe (if ſuch thy will)
Shall bear thee, not repining at the toil,
Since they perceive it is thy will and mine

PHILOCTETES.

This claims my thanks. Now raiſe me, ſince thy mind
Prompts thee to give me aid. Let theſe ſtand off;
Nor be annoy'd with this offenſive ſmell
Ere need requires; enough will they endure,
In the ſame bark with me when they abide.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Of that no more; but raiſe thee, graſp my hand

PHILOCTETES.

Fear not: long uſe hath taught me how to raiſe
My limbs.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Now, O my ſoul, how wilt thou now
Reſolve to act!

PHILOCTETES.

What mean theſe words, my ſon?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Doubt and perplexity diſtract my mind.

PHILOCTETES.

Doubt and perplexity! Oh, ſpeak not thus.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

All their oppreſſing weight lies on me now.

PHILOCTETES.

Doth then the horror of my noiſome wound
Forbid thee to admit me to thy bark?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

All muſt be horror, when the generous heart
Forſakes its nature for unworthy deeds.

PHILOCTETES.

Nor word nor deed unworthy thy high birth,
When thou giveſt ſuffering virtue aid, is thine.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To be deem'd baſe——this long hath grieved my ſoul.

PHILOCTETES.

Not baſe thy deeds; thy words excite my fears.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Direct me, king of heav'n! I ſhall be found
Baſe, doubly baſe; concealing what good faith
Would not conceal, and ſpeaking vile untruths.

PHILOCTETES.

This man, if I conjecture right, will ſail,
And baſely leave me helpleſs and betray'd.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I will not leave thee: but to bear thee hence
So as may wound thy heart, that gives me pain.

PHILOCTETES.

What is thy purpoſe? Tell me, eaſe my doubts.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I will hide nothing from thee. Thou muſt ſail
To Troy, to the Atridæ, and their camp.

PHILOCTETES.

Ah me, what ſay'ſt thou?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Sigh not ere thou hear.

PHILOCTETES.

What ſhould I hear? What wilt thou do with me?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Firſt from theſe miſeries ſave thee; then advance
With thee, and waſte the hated fields of Troy.

PHILOCTETES.

Is this indeed the purpoſe of thy ſoul?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

It is, by ſtrong neceſſity impell'd:
Nor, hearing this, be thou inflamed with rage.

PHILOCTETES.

I am undone, betray'd. Why, ſtranger, why
Haſt thou thus wrong'd me? Give me back my bow.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

That cannot be; the kings muſt be obey'd;
So juſtice and the public good require.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou waſting fire, thou every thing to ſenſe
Moſt hideous, thou deteſted inſtrument
Of horrid villany, what haſt thou done?

How haſt thou wrong'd me? How deceived me? Wretch,
Doſt thou not bluſh to ſee me at thy knees
A ſuppliant? Thou haſt robb'd me of my life,
Taking my bow. I pray thee give it back,
Reſtore it, I implore thee, O my ſon;
Ah, take not, by the gods that guard thy hearth,
Take not what yields my life ſupport, away!
Unhappy me! He ſpeaks not yet, but looks
As he would never part with it again.
Ye ports, ye cliffs projecting o'er the waves,
Ye herds of mountain-beaſts, ye craggy rocks,
To you (none other have I to addreſs)
To you, who oft have heard me, I complain
Of theſe my wrongs. He ſwore to me, this youth,
Son of Achilles, ſwore to bear me home;
To Troy he bears me: pledging his right hand
He took the ſacred bow of Hercules,
And now detains it. To the Grecian hoſt
Vaunting his proweſs, as ſome manly might
He had ſubdued, he drags me hence by force;
Nor knows he that his conqueſt is obtain'd
O'er one long dead, the ſhadow of a ſmoke,
A flitting phantom. Had theſe nerves the ſtrength
Which once they had, he would not triumph now;
Nor but by fraud this conqueſt hath he gain'd.
With falſehoods, wretched me! I am betray'd;
What can I do?—But give me back my bow;
Be thou again thy ſelf. What doſt thou ſay?

Still

Still art thou ſilent? Ah, I am undone!
Thou double opening of my rock, again
I enter thee, but of my arms deprived,
The means of my ſubſiſtence, in thy cave
To waſte away alone, nor winged bird
Nor mountain-beaſt with theſe my ſhafts to pierce,
But 'midſt my woes to die, to be a feaſt
To thoſe on whom I feaſted, and a prey
To thoſe on whom I prey'd, and recompenſe
Slaughter with ſlaughter: thus am I betray'd
By one, whoſe heart, I thought, ne'er harbour'd ill.
I will not curſe thee yet, till I ſhall learn
If honour once more may thy purpoſe change:
If not, may ruin ſeize thee and baſe death!

CHORUS.

What thy commands? It now is thine, O king,
To ſpeed thy ſails, aſſenting to his words.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I am not now firſt moved; my heart long ſince
Hath melted with compaſſion at his woes.

PHILOCTETES.

Oh pity me, I beg thee by the gods,
Nor let thy fame be blacken'd with reproach,
That me with baſeſt fraud thou haſt deceived.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How ſhall I act? Would I had never ſail'd
From Scyros! This employment rends my heart.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou art not baſe, but by baſe men impell'd
To ſhameful actions hither art thou come.
On them (ſuch recompence is juſt) return
Their arts, and ſail; but give me back my arms.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What ſhall we do, my friends?

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

ULYSSES.

What wou'dſt thou do,
Baſeſt of men? Give me the bow; away.

PHILOCTETES.

Ha! Who is this? Ulyſſes do I hear?

ULYSSES.

Ay; and in me Ulyſſes doſt thou ſee.

PHILOCTETES.

Oh, I am ſold, undone! This then was he,
Whoſe arts beguiled, and robb'd me of my arms.

ULYSSES.

It was my deed, I own it, mine alone.

PHILOCTETES.

My ſon, reſtore them; give me back my arms.

ULYSSES.

That, were he willing, he ſhall never do;

But

But with them thou muſt go; or theſe by force
Shall bear thee hence.

PHILOCTETES.

Bear me, audacious wretch,
Thou baſeſt of baſe men, me ſhall they bear
By force?

ULYSSES.

If willingly thou doſt not go.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou land of Lemnos, ye all-conquering flames
By Vulcan kindled, muſt I bear theſe wrongs?
And ſhall he drag me from your coaſts by force?

ULYSSES.

Know thou that Jove, dread ſovereign of this iſle,
Jove thus ordains: I execute his will.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou wretch abhorr'd, what haſt thou now deviſed,
Making the gods thy plea? Are the gods falſe?

ULYSSES.

No; they are true, and point thee out this path.

PHILOCTETES.

I will not go.

ULYSSES.

Thou muſt, thou ſhalt obey.

L. 1008. The Volcanos of the iſland gave birth to this fable. It ſhould have been obſerved before on L. 809 that the tranſlation follows the correction of Brunck, who for ἀναλυμένην, which diſtreſſes all the commentators, reads ἀναχυλυμένην.

PHILOC-

PHILOCTETES.

Unhappy me! What, am I then a slave?

ULYSSES.

No; but a prince 'midst princes; and with such
Thy arms must conquer Troy, and raze her walls.

PHILOCTETES.

No, though I here must suffer every ill,
Never, whilst I have pow'r to climb this rock.

ULYSSES.

What wou'dst thou do?

PHILOCTETES.

Strait throw me from its height,
And with my blood distain the rocks beneath.

ULYSSES.

Lay hold on him, nor let him have that pow'r.

PHILOCTETES.

Alas, ye hands, deprived of your loved bow,
What vile indignity do you sustain!
O thou, whose soul ne'er harbour'd generous thought,
Or upright purpose, how hast thou beguiled,
With what base arts ensnared me in thy toils,
Skulking behind this youth to me unknown,
Not meriting to share thy fraudful guilt,
But worthy of my love! He nothing knew,
He but performs his orders: see his brow
Clouded with grief for what he has misdone,
And I have suffer'd. But thy treacherous soul,

For

For ever peeping from its lurking-place,
Hath taught his noble nature 'gainſt his will
To be expert in miſchief; and, thou wretch,
My hands thus bound, thy purpoſe is declared
To drag me from this ſhore, on which long ſince
Thou didſt expoſe me with unpitying heart
Friendleſs, abandon'd, out-caſt, whilſt alive
Rank'd with the dead. Perdition ſeize thee! Oft
Have I made this my pray'r; but to my pray'rs
The gods grant nothing that delights my ſoul.
To live is thine, and to exult; with grief
My heart is rent, that 'midſt my various ills
I am by thee derided, and the Chiefs
The ſons of Atreus, who command theſe things,
And thou art to their lordly will a ſlave.
Yet didſt thou join their arms compell'd by force,
Thy wiles detected. Me, unhappy me,
The willing leader of ſev'n gallant ſhips,
They with diſgrace caſt out; the guilty deed
Thou on their baſeneſs chargeſt, they on thine.
Why lead me now away? Why drag me hence?
What cauſe impells you? I am nothing now,
To you for ten long years I have been dead.
Baſe and deteſted wretch, is not my foot
Now lame? Is not its ſtench offenſive now?
How, if I mount the bark, will you preſent
Your victims, your libations to the gods?
This was thy plea to leave me on theſe rocks

An out-caſt. May the vengeance of the gods
Pour ruin on you all who wrong'd this wretch,
If juſtice rules their thoughts; it does, it does,
I know it well; for never had your ſails
Stretch'd o'er the ocean for a wretch like me,
But that remorſe, heav'n-ſent, hath pierced your hearts.
But, O my country, O ye gods who view
Theſe things, avenge, avenge me on them all,
And pity me! Your pity I deſerve.
Might I but ſee them periſh, I ſhould think
This burning wound would never pain me more.

CHORUS.

Fierce is his paſſion, and his words are fierce;
He hath a ſoul that yields not to his woes.

ULYSSES.

I could ſay much in anſwer to his ſpeech,
Were this fit time: one word is now enough.
Such where the general cauſe of Greece requires,
Such I am found; but where the cauſe demands
The juſt and good, than me thou wilt not find
A man more pious. Nature prompts my wiſh
Always to be victorious, ſave o'er thee;
To thee I freely yield. Unbind his hands,
Touch him no more, permit him here to ſtay.
We ſhall not want thee, ſince theſe arms are ours.
Teucer is with us, in this art well ſkill'd;
Nor in this ſcience will I yield to thee;
My hands can bend the bow, and aim the ſhaft:

What need of thee? Farewell, and tread the rocks
Of Lemnos: we muſt go: this prize perchance
Will give to me the glory thou ſhou'dſt gain.

PHILOCTETES.

What can I do? Ah helpleſs wretch! Shalt thou
Amidſt the Grecians glory in my arms?

ULYSSES.

No more reply: I haſten to the bark.

PHILOCTETES.

Son of Achilles, wilt thou no more deign
To ſpeak to me, but wilt thou leave me thus?

ULYSSES.

Thou art too generous, look on him no more;
Away, leſt all our fortune thou o'erthrow.

PHILOCTETES.

And will you, friendly ſtrangers, thus depart;
Will you forſake me, and not pity me?

CHORUS.

He is our lord, our galley he commands;
To thee whate'er he ſays, the ſame we ſay.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I ſhall be cenſured as too apt to melt
With pity: nature ſo hath framed my heart.
Yet ſtay with him, if ſuch his wiſh, ſtay here
Till all things are embark'd, and to the gods
We make our vows. Mean time perchance his mind

May take a ſofter temper. We two go;
And you with ſpeed attend us at our call.

PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou rocky cave, now warm with ſummer ſuns,
Now cold with winter's froſts, I ſhall not leave,
No, I ſhall never leave thee; e'en in death
Thou ſhalt be ſtill my manſion. Poor abode,
Thou witneſs of my woes, what day by day
Will now betide me? Whence ſhall I derive
My food, or whence my ſoul-ſupporting hope?
Oh, might the whirlwinds through the howling air
Bear me aloft; their force were welcome now!

CHORUS.

Theſe woes, ill-fated man, theſe woes by choice
Haſt thou drawn on thee; by no other hand,
No foreign force art thou involved in ills.
A better fortune in thy reach was placed,
Hadſt thou been wiſe: thou haſt preferred the worſe.

PHILOCTETES.

I am a wretch, a wretch, oppreſs'd with woes;
And never, never from this hour with man
Shall have my dwelling, but ſhall periſh here.
My food no more ſhall I procure, no more

L. 1117. If by Πτωκάδες here the Harpies are meant, a paſſage in Homer will explain the word: ſpeaking of the daughters of Pandarus he ſays, κοῦρας ἀνείλοντο θύελλαι: this he afterwards expreſſes by κοῦρας Ἅρπυιαι ἀπηυνάντο. See Odyſſ. xx. v. 66. & 77, and the note to Fenton's tranſlation. The ſame idea occurs in the Trachin. v. 970.

Bend

Bend my ſtrong bow, and pierce the flying birds;
For dark and treacherous words, that ever ſmooth
The tongue of fraud, have robbed me of my arms.
Oh, might I ſee the baſe betrayer rack'd
For ſuch a length of time with pains like mine!

CHORUS.

This is the fate aſſign'd thee by the gods;
This is their work, not fraud by us deviſed.
Thy dire and hateful imprecations ſpare,
Spare them: to thee benevolent my heart;
Reject not thou our friendſhip with diſdain.

PHILOCTETES.

Now on the margin of the hoary deep
Laughing he ſits, and poizes in his hands
My life's ſupport, which none hath ever borne.
O my dear bow, from theſe unhappy hands
Wreſted by force, if thou haſt ſenſe, how grieved
Doſt thou behold the toils of Hercules
No more employ thee! Changed thy noble lord,
Thou ſeeſt a vile deceiver guide thy ſhafts;
Thou ſeeſt his hateful and deteſted arts
Hoſtile to me, and all the thouſand wiles
Which to enſnare me he hath baſely forged.

CHORUS.

What in a man is virtuous, juſtice wills

We

L. 1149. Obedience to the commands of their Chief is the character which the Chorus ſupports through this drama. They know that he was engaged, under the direction of Ulyſſes, in an expedition of the higheſt importance to the army: they are faithful to their prince and

We ſpeak; nor while we ſpeak it ſhould thy tongue
A torrent of malignant envy pour.
Call'd forth from all the Chiefs of Greece our lord,
Guided by his wiſe counſils, hath atchieved
A charge of higheſt import to his friends.

PHILOCTETES.

Ye winged birds, ye tribes of tawny beaſts,
That o'er theſe rugged mountains roam, no more,
When from your coverts you come near me, fly:
Theſe hands no more the forceful arrows bear,
(Such now is my ill fortune) but this place
Is now no more deſtructive, and by you
No longer to be fear'd; an happy change
For you: come, in your turn your hunger glut,
And gorge my ſpotted fleſh; I ſoon ſhall leave
My life; for whence ſhall food be now ſupplied?
Who lives on air, deprived of ſtrengthening food,
Whate'er the life-ſuſtaining earth affords?

CHORUS.

Now by the gods, if ſtrangers thou revere,
Meet us with all benevolence; we come
Benevolent to thee: and know, know well
Thou haſt the pow'r to fly this wretched ſtate:

their country. They commiſerate the ſufferings of Philoctetes, and wiſh to relieve them by taking him from his miſerable abode in the deſolate rock; his refuſal to go with them they conſider as malignant obſtinacy; when he execrates the arts of Ulyſſes, they anſwer in his vindication, but inſtantly turn their praiſe to the patriotic virtue of their own Chief, and Ulyſſes is mentioned only incidentally, τῶδ' ἰφημοσύνᾳ, by *his* wiſe counſils: this is perfectly in character. We are ſometimes offended at their duplicity and want of delicacy; but they could act no other part; the drama is ſo much the worſe for it.

But

But to feed grief, to force a thouſand woes
To dwell with us, denotes a mind unwiſe.

PHILOCTETES.

Again, again haſt thou recall'd the ſenſe
Of my old grief, thou kindeſt of all thoſe
That ever viſited this drear abode.
Do not torment me, do not wound my heart—

CHORUS.

Why wilt thou talk thus?

PHILOCTETES.

Forming yet an hope
To lead me to the hated land of Troy.

CHORUS.

That I eſteem thy beſt and wiſeſt choice.

PHILOCTETES.

No more of this: away, and leave me here.

CHORUS.

This thy command with pleaſure I receive,
And willingly obey it. Let us go,
As we are order'd, to our veſſel go.

PHILOCTETES.

By Jove, that hears the ſuppliant, do not go!

CHORUS.

Learn moderation.

PHILOCTETES.

By the gods I beg,
Stay, ſtrangers, ſtay.

CHORUS.

Why theſe lamenting cries?

PHILOCTETES.

Ah me, my fate, my fate! Ah wretched me!
O miſery, miſery! How ſhall I ſuſtain
Henceforth the anguiſh of my wound, and live?
Come back, O ſtrangers, come to me again.

CHORUS.

What wou'dſt thou now? Already haſt thou ſhown
The ſettled purpoſe of a wayward mind.

PHILOCTETES.

Forgive a wretch that ſinks beneath a ſtorm
Of raging anguiſh, which diſtracts his ſenſe.

CHORUS.

Go with us now: let our advice prevail.

PHILOCTETES.

Oh never, never: know my fix'd reſolve:
Not if the thunderer from the flaming ſky
Hurl his red lightenings on me. Periſh Troy,
And all that ſit beneath its walls in arms,
All, whoſe hard hearts an outcaſt left me here.
But, generous ſtrangers, grant me one requeſt.

CHORUS.

And what is thy requeſt?

PHILOCTETES.

Give me a ſword,
An axe, or any weapon of keen edge.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

What deed wou'dſt thou attempt?

PHILOCTETES.

I would hew off
My head, and all theſe wretched limbs. My mind
Calls me, it calls aloud.

CHORUS.

Calls thee to what?

PHILOCTETES.

To ſeek my father.

CHORUS.

Seek thy father! Where?

PHILOCTETES.

In the dark realms below; for he no more
Views heav'n's fair light. How, O my country, how
O city of my fathers, could I bear
To ſhow you, wretched as I am, theſe ills,
Who left your ſacred ſtreams to aid the arms
Of hated Greece! Ah, I am nothing now.

CHORUS.

Hence to our bark we all long ſince had gone,
But that I ſaw Ulyſſes and our lord
This way advancing to us: they are nigh.

Philoctetes retires into the cave.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

ULYSSES.

Wilt thou not tell me why with eager pace
Thy ſteps ſo ſoon returning tread this path?

NEOPTO-

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To make atonement for my former deed
Of baſeneſs.

ULYSSES.

At thy words I ſtand amazed:
What was this deed of baſeneſs?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What with thee
Complying, and th' united hoſt of Greece,
I have effected.

ULYSSES.

What, that ill becomes
Thy honour, haſt thou done?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

A deed of fraud,
And baſe deceit.

ULYSSES.

'Gainſt whom? Ah, haſt thou form'd
Some new deſign?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Not new; but to the ſon
Of Pœas——

ULYSSES.

What thy purpoſe? How thy words
Alarm my fears!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The bow from him received
To him again——

ULYSSES.

ULYSSES.

O Jove, what wilt thou ſay?
Thou wouldſt not give it back?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

It was obtain'd
By baſeneſs and injuſtice.

ULYSSES.

Thou ſpeak'ſt this
But in a ſportive mood.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If to ſpeak truth
Be ſportive.

ULYSSES.

What means this? What haſt thou ſaid,
Son of Achilles?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Haſt thou then a wiſh
That twice I ſpeak theſe words?

ULYSSES.

I had no wiſh
To hear them once.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Know then my purpoſe now:
Thou haſt heard all.

ULYSSES.

There is, be thou aſſured
There is who will prevent thy purpoſe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What!

Who ſhall prevent me?

ULYSSES.

The united hoſt

Of Greece, and with them I.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wiſe though thou art,

Thy words no wiſdom ſhow.

ULYSSES.

Nor wiſe thy words,

Nor would thy deeds be wiſe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If they are juſt,

They have an excellence beyond the wiſe.

ULYSSES.

Where is the juſtice to return the arms
Won by my counſils?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I have done a deed

Of baſeneſs, and will expiate the guilt.

ULYSSES.

Thus acting, fear'ſt thou not the troops of Greece?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

By juſtice guided thy ſuggeſted fears
I ſcorn; nor ſhall thy hand my actions rule.

ULYSSES.

ULYSSES.

No more 'gainſt Troy, but thee, our arms are turn'd.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Let come what will come.

ULYSSES.

See my hand, it graſps
My ſword.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

See mine, my ſword as prompt to graſp.

ULYSSES.

I now forbear thee: to the hoſt of Greece
This will I tell; their vengeance thou ſhalt feel.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thou haſt ſhown wiſdom: always be thus wiſe,
And tears perchance may not bedew thy path.—
Ho! ſon of Pœas! Philoctetes, ho!
Come forth, and quit thy cavern in the rock.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHILOCTETES.

What means this clamorous uproar at my cave?
Why call you me? What would you? Ah, I fear
Some further miſchief. Come you to augment
My woes, and add to ill ſome greater ill?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Be confident, and calmly hear my words.

PHILOCTETES.

Already I have heard them; they were fair:
I truſted them, and baſely was deceived.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Canſt thou forgive? I bluſh at what is paſt.

PHILOCTETES.

So didſt thou ſpeak, ſo win my eaſy faith,
Veiling the treacherous fraud that ſtole my bow.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But not ſo now. This I would hear from thee:
Is thy heart fix'd in this drear cave to ſtay,
Or wilt thou ſail with us?

PHILOCTETES.

Forbear; no more;
For all, which thou canſt urge, will be in vain.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Is this thy firm reſolve?

PHILOCTETES.

Be thou aſſured
It is, more firm than language can expreſs.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

It was my wiſh my words might have prevail'd:
If they offend thee, I will ſay no more.

PHILOCTETES.

Thy plea were vain: nor wilt thou find my heart
Feeling for thee one favourable thought.
Thou haſt deprived me of the means of life;

And

And now with thy monitions art thou come,
Thou hated ſon of an illuſtrious ſire!
Perdition ſeize you all, th' Atridæ firſt,
Ulyſſes next, then thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Forbear thy curſe,
And from my hand receive thy bow again.

PHILOCTETES.

What, am I then a ſecond time deceived?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

By the high awe of holy Jove I ſwear.

PHILOCTETES.

Theſe words, if true, with tranſport fill my ſoul.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The deed ſhall prove them true. Stretch forth thy hand,
And of thy ſacred arms again be lord.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

ULYSSES.

That for th' Atridæ and the Grecian hoſt,
(Ye gods bear witneſs to me) I forbid.

PHILOCTETES.

Whoſe voice is this? Ulyſſes do I hear?

ULYSSES.

Be thou aſſured of that, and ſeeſt him nigh
Who to the plains of Troy will bear thee hence
By force, and in defiance of this Youth.

PHILOC-

PHILOCTETES.

But not with joy, if well this ſhaft be aim'd.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ah no; diſcharge not, by the gods, the ſhaft.

PHILOCTETES.

Nay, by the gods, my ſon, let go my hand.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I muſt not let it go.

PHILOCTETES.

Why wou'dſt thou check
My vengeance on a foe, an hated foe?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

That were to theedishonour, and to me.

PHILOCTETES.

But know thou this; theſe Grecian Chiefs, ſo prompt
With ſtudied falſehoods to betray, in fight
Are daſtards, but right valiant with their tongues.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Well, let that paſs: thou haſt thy bow; no cauſe
Haſt thou of anger, or to blame me more.

PHILOCTETES.

I own it; thou haſt ſhown thy generous blood
Nobly deſcended, not from Siſyphus
But from Achilles, of illuſtrious fame
When living, and illuſtrious 'mongſt the dead.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The praiſe thou giveſt my father and my ſelf

Is grateful to me: but what I desire
From thee t' obtain, now hear. The ills, on men
Inflicted by the gods, they must sustain:
But miseries on themselves by choice derived,
And self-will'd waywardness, have no just claim
To pardon or to pity. All thy thoughts
Are wild and fierce; thy foul disdains advice;
And when with warm benevolence a friend
Glows to direct thee right, thy hatred flames,
And treats him as a foe: yet I will speak,
And call almighty Jove t' attest the truth.
Hear thou my words, and write them on thy heart.
The anguish of this wound was by the gods
Assign'd thee, when thy foot too near approach'd
The fatal place, where lay conceal'd from view
The serpent, guardian of th' uncover'd shrine
At Chryse. From this fierce disease no pause,
Be thou assured, is thine, whilst in the east
Yon sun shall rise, and rolling its bright course
Sink in the west, till it beholds thee tread
With willing steps the plains of Ilium: there
The sons of Æsculapius shalt thou find,

L. 1327. The dry and warm cavities in old tombs and ruined altars afforded a commodious shelter to serpents; such as were found there were superstitiously considered as partaking of the sacredness of the place, and looked upon with reverence. Poetry soon availed itself of so peculiar a circumstance: the portentous dragon amidst the altars at Aulis was sent by Jupiter: and the learned Virgil, having described one of these animals at the tomb of Anchises with all the vivid glow of poetic colouring, says Obstupuit visu Æneas——

Incertus geniumne loci, famulumne parentis
Esse putet.

See Iliad ii. v. 305. and Æneid v. v. 84.

And

And of thy wound be heal'd: then ſhall thy bow,
Join'd by my arms, lay waſte the Phrygian ſtate.
How I know this, attend, and thou ſhalt hear.
Amidſt the Grecian camp there is a man
From Troy, a captive, Helenus, a ſeer
Of high renown: the fates he thus declared;
Adding that ere the preſent ſummer yields
To autumn its dominion, Troy muſt fall:
That this is true he ſets his life at gage.
Aſſured of this, let thy reluctance ceaſe,
Embark with us. What honour to be rank'd
Firſt 'mongſt the Grecian heroes, by the ſons
Of Pæan to be heal'd, to ſtorm the tow'rs
Of Troy lamenting with deep groans her fall,
And graſp the higheſt meed that glory gives!

PHILOCTETES.

Oh hated life, why in the light of heav'n
Doſt thou detain me? Why not ſink me down
To the dark manſions of the dead? Ah me,
To his monitions ſhall I ſtill be deaf?
They flow from generous friendſhip. Should I yield,
How in the face of day could I appear?
With whom hold converſe? How, ye eyes that view
All things around me, would ye bear theſe things?

L. 1355. It is one province of Notes, of ſuch at leaſt as we often find on this author, to add perplexity and confuſion to difficulty. This paſſage is by no means clear; it is thus explained; it may mean either the revolutions of time—or the orbs of the ſun, and perhaps of the moon too—or the eyes of Philoctetes himſelf—or the eyes of thoſe that behold him. In this laſt ſenſe the tranſlator underſtands it; the reader will judge for himſelf.

How

How bear to ſee me friendly with the ſons
Of Atreus, authors of theſe cruel wrongs?
How with Ulyſſes, that deſtructive peſt?
Yet not the juſt reſentment of paſt griefs
Pierces ſo deep as that preſaging ſenſe
Of what I yet muſt ſuffer: for the mind,
That to baſe deeds gives birth, aſſiduous trains,
Like an ill parent, other deeds as baſe.
At thee indeed I marvel much; to Troy
Thou never ſhou'dſt ſteer back thy courſe, and me
Thou ſhou'dſt keep far from thoſe, who baſely wrong'd,
And robb'd thee of thy father's glorious arms. *
Yet wilt thou go, confederate in the war
With theſe, compelling me to join their arms.
Not ſo, my ſon; me to my country ſend,
I have thy oath, do thou at Scyros ſtay,
And let them vilely periſh in return
For their vile deeds; a double grace to me,
And to thy father; to the baſe afford
No aid, but ſhow thou art not baſe like them.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What thou haſt ſaid has reaſon: yet I wiſh
That to the gods obedient, and my words,
With me thy friend from Lemnos thou wou'dſt ſail.

* A ſhort paſſage, which in all the editions diſgraces Sophocles, is here omitted. Brunck rejects it as ſpurious with great indignation, Color ipſe adſuti centonis mangonem prodit.

PHILOCTETES.

What, to Sigæum, and the hated ſon
Of Atreus, with the anguiſh of this wound?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To thoſe, whoſe ſkill ſhall ſtanch this putrid gore,
Heal thy diſeaſe, and free thee from thy pains.

PHILOCTETES.

Why this inglorious meaſure doſt thou urge?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wou'dſt thou comply, thy glory, I foreſee,
It would advance, and mine.

PHILOCTETES.

While thus thou ſpeak'ſt,
Doſt thou not bluſh in reverence of the gods?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why ſhould kind office raiſe a bluſh?

PHILOCTETES.

To me,
Or to th' Atridæ kind?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To thee a friend
I ſpeak the words of friendſhip.

PHILOCTETES.

To my foes
Would friendſhip yield me?

NEOPTO-

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Learn amidſt thy ills
More gentle thoughts.

PHILOCTETES.

I know thee; thy ſoft words
Would ſooth me into ruin.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Far from me
Be ſuch deſign: thou doſt not know——

PHILOCTETES.

I know
The ſons of Atreus left me on theſe rocks.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But (think on this) they wiſh to ſave thee now.

PHILOCTETES.

Not to ſee Troy: my ſoul abhors the thought.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What can I do, ſince all that I can urge
Moves not thy mind? An eaſier part remains,
To urge my plea no more, but let thee live,
As now thou liveſt, thy diſeaſe unheal'd.

PHILOCTETES.

Yes, let me ſuffer what my fate requires
I ſuffer. But, remember, thou haſt pledged
Thy hand to bear me to my houſehold gods:
Perform it; haſte; and think of Troy no more:
Troy hath already cauſed me groans enough.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Well; if it be thy pleaſure, let us go.

PHILOCTETES.

That generous word with tranſport fills my ſoul.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Aſſay thy ſteps.

PHILOCTETES.

With all the ſtrength I have.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Th' avenging Grecians how ſhall I eſcape?

PHILOCTETES.

Regard them not.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Should they my country waſte?

PHILOCTETES.

I will be preſent.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What thy potent aid?

PHILOCTETES.

Theſe ſhafts of Hercules ſhall check their march;
No hoſtile pow'r thy country ſhall approach.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wilt thou do this? Then come, embark with me,
And to the rocks of Lemnos bid farewell.

HERCULES,

HERCULES, PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

HERCULES.

Not yet, O ſon of Pœas: to my words
Firſt be attentive. Know thou hear'ſt the voice
Of Hercules, thine eyes behold his form.
Leaving the heav'nly manſions for thy ſake
I come, announcing the decrees of Jove,
And charge thee not to ſteer thy purpoſed courſe.
Do thou with fix'd attention mark my words.
My fortunes to thy memory I recall,
What dangers I ſubdued, what toils atchieved,
By virtue made immortal, as thine eyes
Behold. And know, thou too muſt ſuffer thus,
And by ſuch toils a life of glory gain.
Go with this leader to the walls of Troy;
There firſt thy fell diſeaſe ſhall be relieved:
There 'midſt the hoſt of Greece in valour rank'd
The nobleſt of her heroes, with thy bow
Paris, the guilty cauſe of all theſe ills,
Thou ſhalt deprive of life, lay waſte the ſtate
Of Troy, and ſend triumphant to thy houſe,
To Oeta, to thy father, the rich ſpoils,
Selected by the hoſt, thy glorious prize.
But bear thou to my funeral pyre theſe ſpoils,
The trophies of my bow.—My mandates now,
Son of Achilles, I to thee addreſs;
For without him thou haſt not pow'r to waſte

The

The fields of Troy; nor he without thy arms;
But, like two lions that together range,
Guard each the other. I to Troy will ſend
Sage Æſculapius; he ſhall heal thy wound;
For Ilium by my ſhafts again muſt fall.
But 'midſt the ravages of conqueſt ſpare,
With reverence ſpare things ſacred to the gods:
This holy awe is pleaſing to high Jove:
For piety with mortals doth not die;
Live they or die, that never periſhes.

PHILOCTETES.

With joy once more beyond my hopes I hear
That voice, with joy that long loſt form behold.
Thy mandates unreluctant I obey.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I too with reverence bow to thy commands.

HERCULES.

Delay not then: the favouring gales ariſe,
Inviting to a proſperous courſe your ſails.

PHILOCTETES.

Well, I now go; but firſt addreſs this land.
Farewell thou manſion, guardian of my life!
Ye Nymphs, that o'er th' irriguous vales preſide,
Farewell, and thou loud roar of daſhing waves!
Oft hath your foam within this cavern'd rock,
Driv'n by the ſtormy South, bedew'd my head.
And thou, Hermæan mountain, who my groans

Haſt oft re-echoed in my ſtorms of woe!
Now, O ye fountains, and ye dulcet ſtreams,
I leave you, now I leave you: this my thoughts
Never preſaged. Farewell, thou wave-waſh'd ſhore
Of Lemnos; ſpeed my courſe, and ſend me ſafe
Whither my glorious deſtiny now calls,
The counſils of my friends, and that high pow'r
Whoſe ſovereign will theſe great events ordain'd!

CHORUS.

Let us now go, together let us go,
And to the ocean-nymphs preſent our vows
With guardian care to ſpeed our wiſh'd return.





ELECTRA.

EGESLKV

ELECTRA.

THE Choephoræ of Æſchylus, and the Electra of Euripides have already been preſented to the Engliſh reader. Of the neceſſity which obliged Oreſtes to execute this revenge on the murderers of his father, and of the fierce and determined character of Electra, enough has been ſaid in the tranſlator's prefaces to thoſe tragedies: a ſhort view of the management of the ſubject by the three great poets may not be unpleaſing here. Euripides yielding to the bold and exalted genius of Æſchylus, purſued a plan more adapted to the exquiſite ſenſibility of his own mind, and by preſenting his Electra in a ruſtic cottage, and patiently engaged in the laborious offices of her humble ſtation, he renders her amiable before he diſplays the noble elevation of her mind: he always knew the way to touch the heart. Sophocles has dared to diſpute the palm with Æſchylus even on his own ground; but he was too prudent to meet him at the tomb of Agamemnon: the firſt Choral Ode of the Choephoræ, the oblations and vows of Electra, her diſcovery of Oreſtes there, and their united invocations of their father's ſhade, are ſo ſublime, ſo ſolemn, and ſo aweful, that a ſucceeding poet had little to hope from a ſimilar attempt. Sophocles therefore preſents his Electra before the gates of the palace, and has called forth all

the magic powers of his poetry in her ſoliloquy; this, and her firſt conference with the Chorus, are to an high degree affecting; ſhe appears with all the dignity of grief and virtuous reſentment; but in Æſchylus this derives an aweful grandeur from the ſolemnity of the ſcene. Sophocles was ſenſible of this, and unwilling to loſe a grace, which however he could not reach. Æſchylus had repreſented Clytemneſtra as terrified with dreams and viſions, and ſending Electra with oblations to the tomb of Agamemnon: her fears are deſcribed in that poet's boldeſt manner;

> She fanſied ſhe had giv'n a dragon birth.—
> This new-born dragon, like an infant child,
> Laid in the cradle ſeem'd in want of food;
> And in her dream ſhe held it to her breaſt.—
> The milk he drew was mix'd with clotted blood.—
> She cried out in her ſleep with wild affright.

Sophocles alſo repreſents her as terrified with dreams and viſions, and ſending Chryſothemis in like manner to the tomb;

> This is the voice of rumour, that ſhe ſaw
> Thine and my father to the light return'd
> Once more her huſband; in the earth he fix'd
> The ſceptre of his anceſtors, which once
> He bore, but now Ægiſthus; from its top
> Sprouted a vigorous branch, and ſpread its ſhade
> Wide o'er Mycenæ and its ample realms.

Theſe viſions characterize the different genius of the two poets: the ideas of Æſchylus are vaſt, exalted, and daring; Sophocles is rich, ſplendid, and judicious; Æſchylus had ſeized the higheſt excellence of compoſition, the true ſublime, and in this he ſhines with unrivaled luſtre; but in the judi-

cious accommodation of these conceptions to the conduct of the drama, in the richness, union and harmony of its parts, Sophocles was never equaled. From the departure of Chrysothemis to the tomb he draws from his own stores. The interview of Electra with her mother is a wonderful scene; the narrative of the death of Orestes is well imagined; and the introduction of the urn, said to contain his ashes, shows the finest judgement, not only as it produces circumstances which tend to exalt the character of Electra, but as it renders the discovery of Orestes peculiarly tender and interesting, and facilitates the dreadful catastrophe.

Persons of the Drama.

ORESTES.

PYLADES, MUTA PERSONA.

ÆGISTHUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

ELECTRA.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

OLD ATTENDANT ON ORESTES.

CHORUS OF MYCENÆAN VIRGINS.

ELECTRA.

ORESTES, PYLADES, ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT.

THOU ſon of Agamemnon, who 'gainſt Troy
Once led the pow'rs of Greece, now may thine eyes
Behold what long hath raiſed thy ardent wiſh.
This is the antient Argos; this the grove
Of Iö, ſtung with frenzy o'er the earth
To wander; the Lycæan forum this
Of the Lycæan Phœbus; on the left
Glorious through Greece that ſtately temple ſtands
Sacred to Juno. Now we are advanced
Whence thou may'ſt ſee Mycenæ rich in gold;
And this the houſe of the Pelopidæ
With frequent ſlaughters ſtain'd: in times long paſt,
Beneath his murderers when thy father fell,
I took thee from thy ſiſter's pious hand,

I bore

I bore thee hence, I ſaved thee, to this age
I train'd thee to avenge thy father's blood.
This hour, Oreſtes, and thou faithful friend,
Loved Pylades, demands your firm reſolves:
This hour determine; for the early ſongs
Of birds call forth the ſun's reſplendent beams,
And the ſtars vaniſh from the duſky night.
Now, ere the foot of man from forth the gates
Shall tread the ſtreets, conſult: for from this hour
Th' important time to inſtant action calls.

ORESTES.

O thou moſt loved of ſervants, ſtrong the proofs
Thou giveſt me of thy goodneſs and firm faith:
For as the generous ſteed e'en in old age
Of his high courage in the fierce alarm
Abates not, but with pride ſuſtains the charge,
So doſt thou urge me forward, and advance
E'en in the front of danger: for this cauſe
I will unfold my counſils; to my words
Give thou attentive heed, and where I judge
Amiſs, thy riper prudence be my guide.
When to the fate-foretelling ſhrine I came
Of Pytho, and enquired by what beſt way
I on his impious murderers might avenge
My father's blood, this anſwer Phœbus gave,
" In arms advance not, nor with martial force,
But ſteal upon them, and with fraudful hand
Let thy juſt fury ſtrike th' avenging blow."

Theſe mandates known, as time and chance preſent
A fair occaſion, enter thou this houſe,
And learn what paſſes there; me much imports
Clear information; thee they will not know
Abſent ſo long, and changed by hoary age;
Nor thus attired ſuſpicion wilt thou wake.
Thou art a ſtranger, ſo addreſs thy tale,
Of Phocis, ſent by Phanoteus, now join'd
In cloſe alliance with them; ſay, and add
The ſanction of an oath, that by the force
Of ruthleſs fate Oreſtes is no more,
Hurl'd from his chariot in the Pythian games.
This be the purport of thy tale. Mean time,
Obedient to the god, my father's tomb
We with libations and theſe ſever'd locks
Will honour. Thence returning, in our hands
The brazen ſculptured urn, now, as thou know'ſt,
Hid in the tangled thicket, we will bring;
That we may thus deceive them with a tale
To them moſt grateful, that my wretched corſe
Already on the funeral pile is burnt,
And my cold aſhes in this urn encloſed.
Why ſhould this grieve me, that in words I die,
When I in deed am ſaved, and by them raiſed
To glory? Nor ill-omen'd ſhall I deem

A word

L. 51. Oreſtes is here acting by the expreſs command of Apollo; and is not to be conſidered as impious in this oath, but as obedient to the will of the god. Camerar.

L. 66. P. Brumoy, who was well acquainted with the ſuperſtition of the antients, reſolves

A word which gives the promiſe of ſucceſs.
Oft e'en the wiſe have I obſerved, by fame
Reported dead, return, and riſe again
To higher honour. Such ſhall be my boaſt,
I from this rumour ſhall be found alive,
And, like a ſtar, to my aſtoniſh'd foes
Yet ſhine. But, O my country, and ye gods
The guardians of my country, to your care
Receive me, and protect me in theſe ways!
And thou, my father's houſe! for I am come
With vengeance, at the impulſe of the gods,
To purge thy ſtain away: ſend me not hence
Diſhonour'd, but to wealth, to greatneſs raiſed,
Give me thy antient glories to reſtore!
Of this enough. Be it thy care, old man,
The part aſſign'd thee to diſcharge. We two
Muſt leave thee now; th' occaſion ſo requires,
Whoſe ſovereign power o'er every work preſides.

ELECTRA, *within.*

O miſerable me!

this into the dread of words of ill preſage. His Editor cenſures him as inaccurate, and ſays, Il n'eſt queſtion ici ni de ſuperſtitions, ni de preſage funeſte. He then gives his ſenſe of the line as containing what he might well call "a deteſtable maxim," Pour moi je ne tiens pour mauvaiſe aucune parole (aucune tromperie) dès qu'elle eſt utile. The critic is very unhappy in his interpretation: it is neither conſonant to the manly character of Oreſtes, nor to the reſt of his ſpeech. A paſſage in the Helena of Euripides will throw light on this. When that lady for the ſafety of her huſband propoſed to ſpeak of him to the king of Ægypt as dead, Menelaus replies

That were an omen boding ill: yet thence
May aught be gain'd, report of me as dead. L. 1132.

ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT.

Some female ſervant with the voice of grief
Methinks I hear lamenting in the houſe.

ORESTES.

Is it not rather poor Electra's voice?
Wilt thou we ſtay and liſten to her moans?

ATTENDANT.

That muſt not be: no deed may we attempt
Ere we perform the mandates of the god.
Begin with theſe; and at thy father's tomb
Pour the libations: that will give us ſtrength
To act, and conqueſt to our toils enſure.

ELECTRA.

Thou holy light, thou air around the earth,
Extended wide, how often haſt thou heard
My ſtrains of woe, how often heard me beat
My bleeding breaſt, when night before the dawn
Withdraws her darkening veil! For in her ſhades
The hated couches of this mournful houſe
Are conſcious to my grief, while I lament
My father's ruin: him the god of war
Sunk not with wounds in a barbaric land;
My mother, and the partner of her bed,
Ægiſthus, hew'd him with the bloody axe
As woodmen hew an oak; nor does thy death,
My father, thy unjuſt and cruel death
With ſorrow touch one female heart, ſave mine.

But never will I ceaſe my ſtrains of woe,
My mournful lamentations, whilſt I view
The ſtars bright radiance, whilſt I view the day.
No; as ſome nightingale, her young ones loſt,
Before my father's gates I pour to all
My wailings, and the notes of woe, aloud.
O houſe of Pluto and his gloomy queen;
O Hermes, guide to the infernal realms;
Thou, dreaded Ate; and ye pow'rs revered,
Terrific Furies, daughters of the gods;
Thoſe, who by impious hands were ſlain, you ſee;
Thoſe, who by ſtealth the royal bed invade;
Come, aid, avenge my murder'd father's blood;
Send me my brother; for this weight of grief,
Which ſinks me, I no more can bear alone!

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Why, poor Electra, in thy mother's crimes
For ever wretched, wilt thou pine away
In never-ceaſing grief? Why ſtill lament
The royal Agamemnon, long ſince caught
In that moſt impious woman's treacherous wiles,
And baſely to a murderer's hands betray'd?
Periſh the wretch, if I may form that wiſh,
So periſh he, who dared the bloody deed!

ELECTRA.

Ye virgins, who from noble parents boaſt
Your generous blood, you come amidſt my woes
To bring me conſolation. Well I know
Theſe things, I underſtand them well, no part
Eſcapes me; yet I will not ceaſe to grieve;
No; I will never ceaſe to mourn, and wail
My murder'd father's fate. But, O my friends,
Dear to my heart by every tender tie
Of mutual love, permit me thus to pour,
Ah me! I pray you, my unceaſing griefs.

CHORUS.

Yet neither will thy griefs or pray'rs recall
Thy father o'er that lake, whoſe ſullen ſtream
All, ſprung from mortal race, are doom'd to paſs.
Why then not moderate thy ſorrows? Why
Thus waſte away in wild exceſs of grief,
Which from thy ills gives no redemption? Why
This fondneſs for intolerable woe?

ELECTRA.

He to all ſenſe is loſt, who can forget
A parent's cruel death. The mournful bird,
The meſſenger of Jove, that always wails

L. 131. It has been the ſubject of ſerious diſpute whether the Chorus is formed of Virgins or of Matrons. They are not once ſtiled παρθένοι, nor on the other hand is there any alluſion to their married ſtate. Γυναῖκες is a common name. Deianira addreſſes the Trachinian Virgins, φίλαι γυναῖκες, v. 229. The word μάτηρ, v. 236, is uſed only in a ſimile, from which no argument can be drawn. It is more conſonant to manners that the friends and companions of Electra ſhould be Virgins; and ſhe addreſſes them as daughters of illuſtrious fathers, not as wives of illuſtrious huſbands.

Her

Her Itys, her loſt Itys, ſooths my ſoul
With all the tender ſympathy of grief.
And thee, unhappy Niobe, I hold
In reverence as divine, who pour'ſt thy tears
Fix'd in a rock, the monument of woe.

CHORUS.

Yet not by thee alone of all that breathe
Is ſorrow felt. What ſhare is thine, beyond
Thoſe in this houſe by blood to thee allied?
Such is the life Chryſothemis endures;
Such Iphianaſſa's ſufferings; ſuch the Youth's,
Who in concealment and in ſilence mourns.

ELECTRA.

Him bleſt and glorious this illuſtrious land
Of rich Mycenæ ſhall again receive,
The nobly-born Oreſtes, to theſe realms
Returning by the favouring pow'r of Jove.
With ardent expectation his return
I look for, wretched, childleſs, uneſpouſed,
Reſtleſs, for ever bath'd in tears that flow
In anguiſh for my never-ceaſing ills.
Yet all my kindneſs he mean-time forgets,
All my inſtructions. How have I been mock'd

L. 155. Ἀτ' ἰν τάφῳ πετραίᾳ δι, δι δακρύει.
Thus Ovid. Met. Lib. vi.

Turn'd to ſolid ſtone,
Yet ſtill ſhe weeps, and whirl'd by ſtormy winds,
Borne thro' the air, her native country finds;
There fix'd, ſhe ſtands upon a bleaky hill,
There yet her marble cheeks eternal tears diſtill.

With

With meſſages? He wiſhes to return,
But to his wiſh he deigns not to appear.

CHORUS.

Sink not, Ah ſink not in deſpair. In heav'n
From his high throne Almighty Jove beholds
And governs all things: to his pow'r reſign
Thy flaming indignation; let not hate
Too far tranſport thee; nor forget theſe wrongs.
Time is a lenient god. Nor will the ſon
Of Agamemnon on the paſtured beach
Of Chriſa linger, never to return,
Nor the dread god that reigns o'er Acheron.

ELECTRA.

But of my life how much to me is loſt
Already? And, by hope not chear'd, my ills
No longer can I bear, but waſte away;
My parents loſt, and by no worthy friend
Protected, like a foreign ſlave I ſerve,
Diſgraceful taſk! within my father's houſe,
My table ſcanty, and my veſtments mean.

CHORUS.

Mournful at his return the voice of woe,
Through all the chambers of thy father's houſe
Mournful the voice, when the relentleſs axe
In tempeſt fell. Fraud firſt deviſed, Luſt ſtruck
The murderous blow, with horrid thought of old
Forming the horrid image, were theſe deeds
Or by ſome god, or daring mortals, wrought.

ELECTRA.

O day, how hateful to me were thy beams!
O fatal night, and all the hideous woes
Of that nefarious ſupper! O vile death,
Which cloſed my father's eyes, how baſely ſlain,
Slain by the hands of two! Thoſe hands deſtroy'd
My life, betray'd, abandon'd, and undone.
Oh may the mighty god, that holds his ſeat
On high Olympus, on their heads repay
Avenging ſufferings! Never may they taſte
The ſweet delights of joy, who did theſe things!

CHORUS.

Let prudence teach thee caution: curb thy ſpeech.
Doſt thou not ſee from what a ſplendid ſtate
Already thou art ſunk, diſgraced with wrongs
Suffer'd by thee alone? And greater wrongs
Still ſhalt thou ſuffer, if thy mourning heart
With wars is always pregnant. To contend
With potent ſovereigns is unequal ſtrife.

ELECTRA.

I am compell'd by miſeries: yet I know
My madneſs; yes, my friends, I know it well;
But, in the anguiſh of ſuch deep-felt griefs,
I will not check it whilſt my life remains.
For who with lenient words can ſooth my ſoul?
What now can ſage advice? Forbear, forbear
To comfort me. Theſe griefs ſhall have no end;

No;

No; from my ſorrows I will never ceaſe,
But with eternal wailings mourn my fate.

CHORUS.

I ſpeak through pure benevolence of heart,
As a fond mother anxious for her child,
Let not thy ills give birth to other ills.

ELECTRA.

Have then my ills a bound? Say, can the heart
Feel a juſt ſenſe of virtue, and forget
A murder'd parent? Nature at the thought
Is ſhock'd. From them no honour would I have;
Nor, were I wedded to ſome worthy man,
Would I live with him huſhing all my griefs
To peace, and checking their ſhrill-ſounding flight,
My father ſo diſgracing. If the dead,
As earth, and nothing more, neglected lies,
And if no vengeance waits their crimes, farewell
To ſhame, farewell to piety 'mongſt men.

CHORUS.

Our duty, by our zeal for thee enforced,
Induced us hither: if our friendly words
Offend thy ſenſe of honour, we deſiſt;
Thine be the conqueſt, and to follow, ours.

ELECTRA.

I am aſhamed, my friends, if deem'd by you
Indulging an exceſs of grief and tears;
But they are wrung from me by bitter force;
Forgive me then. How can a woman, ſprung

From noble blood, who ſees her father's wrongs,
Not mourn as I do, who each day, each night,
Behold thoſe wrongs encreaſing with freſh force?
My mother, ſhe who bore me, is the firſt
In all deſpiteful treatment. Then I live
In mine own houſe with thoſe, whoſe impious hands
Murder'd my father; theſe I feel my lords,
And at their pleaſure I receive, or want.
Think then what grief-embitter'd days I paſs,
When ſeated on my father's throne I ſee
Ægiſthus, ſee him in my father's robes
Array'd, and pouring to the houſehold gods
Libations on the ſpot where his curs'd hand
Shed the king's blood. And (oh that blackeſt ſtain!)
I ſee the murderer in my father's bed
With my abandon'd mother, if the name
Of mother be her due, who ſhares this bed
With him, unbluſhing with this man of blood
Cohabits, and no vengeful Fury fears;
But, as exulting in her horrid deeds,
Oft as the month leads round the welcome day
In which my father by her wiles ſhe ſlew,
She forms the feſtal dance, and to the gods,
As guardians of her houſe, the victims ſlays.
Theſe things I ſee, and weep, and waſte away

L. 265. Clytemneſtra, in imitation of the ſolemn honours paid to the gods and heroes on the New Moons, called therefore ἴμμηνα ἱερὰ, inſtituted a monthly feſtival, with ſacrifices to the Gods her Preſervers, on the day on which Agamemnon was murdered. This was celebrated with ſongs and dances, and a feaſt inſolently called Epulæ Agamemnoniæ.

At a vile feaſt, that bears my father's name,
In ſecret mourning, for I dare not pour
My tears to ſooth the anguiſh of my ſoul;
For ſoon this woman, to her noble name
A foul diſgrace, calls out, and with harſh words
Reviles me, "Wretch, deteſted by the gods,
To thee alone then did thy father die?
Does none but thou lament him? Get thee hence,
And periſh: never may th' infernal gods
Soften the ſorrows which now rend thy heart!"
Thus ſhe reviles me; but if one ſhe hears
Speak of Oreſtes as returning, wild
With rage ſhe comes, and thunders in my ears,
"Thou art the cauſe of this; this is thy work;
By thee Oreſtes from my hand was ſnatch'd,
By thee in ſecret hence convey'd: but know
Thou ſhalt be puniſh'd as thy deeds deſerve."
Then to her ſavage menace adding flames
Comes her illuſtrious huſband, that diſgrace
To manhood, who his coward battles fights,
Polluted monſter, with a woman leagued.
Whilſt expectation always prompts my hopes
That, arm'd with vengeance to repreſs theſe ills,
Oreſtes will return, I pine with grief.
Still he delays to act; and this delay
Sinks all my preſent, and my future hopes.
In ſuch a ſtate, my friends, the human mind
But ill preſerves a calm well-temper'd frame,

And holy reverence; but, oppreſs'd with ills,
By ſad conſtraint turns all its thoughts to ill.

CHORUS.

But tell us, is Ægiſthus, while we hold
This converſe, near, or diſtant from this place?

ELECTRA.

Far diſtant in the country: were he near,
Think not I thus might walk before the gates.

CHORUS.

If it be ſo, more freely may we hold
Diſcourſe, and unreſtrain'd enquiry make.

ELECTRA.

What thy mind prompts thee, aſk, from him ſecure.

CHORUS.

Firſt of thy brother then it is my wiſh
To know. Returns he, or delays he ſtill?

ELECTRA.

Oft hath he promiſed; nothing he performs.

CHORUS.

In arduous actions men muſt oft delay.

ELECTRA.

But him without delay I fondly ſaved.

CHORUS.

But of his noble nature be aſſured;
This will impell him to protect his friends.

ELECTRA.

Of this my ſoul hath ever been aſſured;
Elſe in this ſtate I had not lived ſo long.

CHORUS.

Speak now no more; for from the gates I ſee
Chryſothemis advance, thy ſiſter ſprung
From the ſame parents: in her hands ſhe bears
Sepulchral offerings, honours to the dead.

CHRYSOTHEMIS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Why, O my ſiſter, is thy voice thus raiſed
Before the portal? Will no length of time
Teach thee no more to feed thy feeble rage
With thoughts as vain? I feel theſe preſent ills,
And, if I know my ſelf, had I the pow'r,
Would ſhow my thoughts: but, while the ſtorm is high,
I deem it prudent to let down my ſails,
Nor dream of mighty deeds, while void of force
I cannot hurt. Thus would I thou ſhou'dſt act.
Yet what I ſay perhaps hath not ſuch ſtrength
Of reaſon as thy firmer conduct ſhows;
But, as becomes my birth if I would live,
The potent muſt in all things be obey'd.

ELECTRA.

How ſhameful this, deſcended as thou art
From ſuch a father, to forget his worth,
And court thy mother's favour! For by her

All thy monitions to me were enjoin'd,
Her teaching, not the dictates of thy heart.
What ſhould I think? Thy nature muſt be baſe;
Or, if not baſe, no memory of thy friends
Doſt thou retain. Thou ſaid'ſt, hadſt thou the pow'r,
Thy hate thou ſoon wou'dſt ſhow them: yet with me,
On vengeance for my father always bent,
Thou wilt not act, but rather wiſh to check
My purpoſe. Is not this to add to ills
Baſe cowardice? But tell me, or learn thou
From me, what good ſhould I obtain, my griefs
Should I command to ceaſe? Do I not live?
But ill, I know; yet I am ſatisfied.
I grieve their hearts in paying to the dead
Theſe honours, if the dead have yet a ſenſe
Of honours. Thou doſt hate them: but thy hate
Is in words only; thou canſt bear to live
Amidſt thy father's murderers. But my ſoul
Would never bend, would never yield to them,
No, ſhould they bring me all thoſe gorgeous gifts
With which thou now art deck'd. To thee be placed
A table richly ſpread, with diſhes piled;
But let my homely fare be only ſuch
As nature loaths not. I have not a wiſh
To gain thy honours; nor indeed wou'dſt thou,
Did reaſon rule thee. Now thou might'ſt be call'd
The daughter of a father firſt in fame;
Be call'd thy mother's: ſo ſhalt thou appear,

To all that judge aright, of nature baſe,
Falſe to thy murder'd father, and his friends.

CHORUS.

Now, by the gods, let nothing paſs in wrath.
Much mutual good your reaſonings might produce,
Wert thou to hers attentive, ſhe to thine.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I have been long accuſtom'd to ſuch words
From her, my friends; and never had I touch'd
This tender point, but that ſome dreadful ill
Advances on her, which will check her griefs.

ELECTRA.

What dreadful ill is this? If more ſevere
Than theſe, thy counſil I no more oppoſe.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Far as I know it I will tell thee all.
They purpoſe, if thou ceaſe not thy loud griefs,
To ſend thee where no more thou ſhalt behold
The ſun's bright radiance, in ſome chearleſs vault
To live, far diſtant, there to chant thy woes.
Reflect; nor henceforth blame me when theſe ills
Fall heavy on thee: this is wiſdom's hour.

ELECTRA.

Thus will they treat me? Is their purpoſe fix'd?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Soon as Ægiſthus ſhall return.

ELECTRA.

And ſoon
May he for this return.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What dreadful wiſh
Haſt thou thus raſhly form'd?

ELECTRA.

That he may come,
If thus he thinks to act.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

That thou may'ſt feel
Their vengeance! What thy meaning?

ELECTRA.

Far from you
That I may fly.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

And haſt thou for thy life
No care, no thought?

ELECTRA.

Mine is a glorious life,
Exciting admiration!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Wou'dſt thou take
Calm prudence for thy guide, it might be ſuch.

ELECTRA.

Teach me not baſeneſs to my friends.

CHRYSO-

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I teach
No baſeneſs, but ſubmiſſion to the great,
Who hold the ſovereign pow'r.

ELECTRA.

Cringe to them thou;
I ſcorn to cringe.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Well were it not to fall
Through wayward willfullneſs.

ELECTRA.

If I muſt fall,
My father's death avenging let me fall.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Of us our father, well am I aſſured,
Requires not this.

ELECTRA.

Such words the baſe alone
Can e'er applaud.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Will no perſuaſions move
Thy heart to yield aſſent?

ELECTRA.

None: from my heart
Far be ſuch weakneſs.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Hence then will I go,
And execute my charge.

ELECTRA.

What charge? To whom
Bear'ſt thou thoſe offerings?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

By my mother ſent
To pour libations at my father's tomb.

ELECTRA.

What ſay'ſt thou? Sent to him whom, when he lived,
She moſt abhorr'd!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

And with her own hand ſlew,
So wou'dſt thou ſay.

ELECTRA.

Perſuaded by her friends?
Who thus adviſed her?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

She was moved, I think,
By dreadful viſions, terrors of the night.

ELECTRA.

Gods of my fathers, give us now your aid!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What from theſe terrors animates thy hope?

ELECTRA.

Tell me the viſion, thou ſhalt know my hopes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I know not all; but little can I ſpeak.

ELECTRA.

Tell me that little: oft imperfect words
Sink mortals low, or raiſe their ſpirits high.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

This is the voice of rumour, that ſhe ſaw
Thine and my father, to the light return'd,
Once more her huſband; in the earth he fix'd
The ſceptre of his anceſtors, which once
He bore, but now Ægiſthus; from its top
Sprouted a vigorous branch, and ſpread its ſhade
Wide o'er Mycenæ and its ample realms.
This from one preſent, when ſhe told her dream
To the bright Sun, I heard. No more than this
I know, but that ſhe ſent me to the tomb
Struck with this fear. Now by our country's gods
I pray thee, be perſuaded; do not ruſh
On ruin through perverſeneſs: ſhou'dſt thou now
Reject me, thou wilt ſeek me in thy ills.

ELECTRA.

But nothing, my loved ſiſter, of theſe gifts
Affix thou to the tomb; it is not meet,
It is not holy, that ſuch offerings, ſent
By this malignant woman, ſhould be placed;

L. 425. This is in conformity to the ſuperſtition of the antients. When any viſion, or dream, or other circumſtance of ill or uncertain preſage occurred to them in the night, they told it in the morning to the earth, to the air, to the ſkies, or to ſome deity. See the Alceſtis of Euripides, L. 246. Medea, L. 64. Iphigenia in Tauris, L. 52, of the tranſlation. But the addreſs was with peculiar propriety made to the Sun, as the averter of the evils of the night.

Or ſuch libations to our father's ſhade
Be pour'd: no: give them to the winds, or dig
Deep in the covering earth, and hide them there;
That nothing of them where our father reſts
May ever come, but lie a precious ſtore
For her when dead, and in the realms below.
For were not ſhe, of all her ſex, moſt loſt
To ſhame, this hateful goblet to the man
Her own hands murder'd never had ſhe crown'd.
For canſt thou think the dead within his tomb,
His indignation ſoften'd, will receive
Theſe offerings from the hand by which he died
Diſhonour'd, mangled with relentleſs hate,
Amidſt th' ablutions all the ſtains of blood
Wiped on his head? And canſt thou think theſe things
Will make atonement for the murderous deed?
It may not be: then think of them no more.
But cut thou off thy fair and criſped curls,
And from my wretched head (ſmall gift indeed,
But all I have to give) theſe ſqualid locks;
With them preſent my zone, not richly wrought
With bright embroidery: bow before the tomb,
And pour thy prayers that from beneath the earth
Propitious he would come, againſt our foes
A ſtrong protector; that with potent hand

L. 447. See the Choephoræ of Æſchylus, L. 437, and the tranſlator's note.

L. 448. Thereby hoping to transfer all the pollution from themſelves on the head of the perſon murdered. Heath.

His

His ſon, Oreſtes, may return, and live,
And trample thoſe, that hate him, in the duſt:
Then will we crown his tomb with richer gifts
Than now we can preſent. Theſe things I think,
Yes, I will think he makes theſe things his care,
And therefore with theſe dreams appalls her ſoul.
Do thou, my ſiſter, in this hope perform
Theſe things, for my ſake, for thine own, for his,
Deareſt of all that breath'd this vital air,
Our father, laid in the unſparing tomb.

CHORUS.

This from a pious heart the virgin ſpeaks:
Our love exhorts thee to diſcharge the truſt.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Yes, I will do it: for when juſtice bids,
Reaſon diſputes not, but makes haſte to act.
But by the gods, my friends, whilſt I attempt
Theſe works, amidſt you well the ſecret guard;
For ſhould my mother know it, much I fear
I ſhould have cauſe the daring deed to mourn.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

If wiſdom with one præſcient ray
Illumes the darkneſs of my ſoul,
The vengeful Fury ſpeeds her way;
Before her, baleful omens ſcowl;

I hear

I hear the flapping of their wings;
The force of juſtice in her hands ſhe brings.
The dreadful viſions of the night I hear:
They breathe ſweet muſic to my ear;
My courage kindles at th' inſpiring ſound.
Thy father rouſes in the realms below;
Ne'er will the king of Greece forget his wound,
Ne'er the old Axe of braſs, that ſtruck th' inſidious blow.

ANTISTROPHE.

She comes, with all her hundred hands,
Her hundred feet, the furious pow'r,
No more in dreadful ambuſh ſtands;
She comes, ſhe knows her torturing hour;
With feet of braſs I hear her tread;
She marks th' unholy, blood-polluted bed:
Vengeful 'gainſt thoſe th' accurſed attempt who dared,
And thoſe the horrid deed who ſhared,
She ſends theſe boding ſigns, nor ſends in vain.
If aught of truth terrific dreams diſcloſe,
If aught the oracle's prophetic ſtrain,
This viſion of the night our happier ſtate foreſhows.

EPODE.

How black with miſeries to this land,
O Pelops, was thy fatal courſe,
When jealous Piſa's dangerous ſtrand
Saw thy ſwift car's victorious force!

For

For ſince by rage, untaught to ſpare,
The hapleſs Myrtilus was ſlain,
Hurl'd headlong from the golden car,
And plunged into the roaring main,
Strife in this houſe delights to dwell,
And Murder ſhrieks with hideous yell.

CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

At large then thou art ranging, I perceive,
Ægiſthus abſent, who within theſe gates
Always reſtrain'd thee, that thou mightſt not ſhame
Thy friends: now free from his controul, to me
Thou ſhow'ſt no reverence; but thy froward tongue
Oft ſpeaks of me as haughty, and unjuſt
In my commands, and inſolent to thee,
And thine. My nature knows not inſolence;
Nor ſpeak I harſhly to thee, but provoked
By thy repeated harſhneſs, and reproach,
That by my hand thy father died. (Thy plea
This only made) By me thy father died;
I know it well, nor ſhall deny the deed;
For juſtice ſtruck the blow, nor I alone;
And thee, if wiſdom ruled thee, it behoved
To aid me: for thy father, thus bewail'd,
Alone of all the Grecians ſteel'd his heart
To ſacrifice thy ſiſter to the gods:
He never felt, like me, a mother's throes.

I urge

I urge not that: but tell me for what cauſe
Or for whoſe ſake he bade this victim bleed.
Say'ſt thou for Greece? No right had Greece to ſlay
My child. Or was it for his brother's ſake?
He ſlew my daughter: ſhould not I repay
Such deeds with juſt revenge? Had *he* no child?
Had he not two? And theſe with juſter right
Had been devoted, as of parents born
Whoſe cauſe avenging Greece embark'd for Troy.
Or had th' infernal god more keen deſire
To gorge him with my children, than with hers?
Or was this barbarous father's love grown cool
To children born of me, but warm to thoſe
Born to his brother? Was not this the part
Of an unfeeling father, to all ſenſe
Of goodneſs loſt? I think ſo, though I ſpeak
What to thy thoughts is adverſe; ſo my child
That died would ſpeak, could ſhe her voice regain.
Hence for this deed no ſorrow, no remorſe
Hath ever touch'd my heart. To thee perchance
I ſeem to judge amiſs: but weigh things well,
Let juſtice hold the beam, then blame thy friends.

ELECTRA.

Thou wilt not ſay this harſhneſs was provoked
Now by my harſh reproach. But, grant me leave,

L. 537. Heſiod ſays that, beſides Hermione, Menelaus had a ſon, named Nicoſtratus, by Helena. Sophocles availed himſelf of this authority.

Of

Of my dead father, and my ſiſter's death,
As truth and reaſon prompt me, I will ſpeak.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou haſt my leave: and hadſt thou always thus
Addreſs'd me, nothing harſh had been replied.

ELECTRA.

Then I will ſpeak. My father by thy hand
Was ſlain: thou freely doſt avow the deed.
And can there be a deed of blacker ſtain,
E'en though he juſtly died? But I will ſay
That not with juſtice didſt thou ſtrike the blow.
No: the perſuaſions of that wicked man,
Thy baſe compeer in guilt, allured thee. Aſk
The huntreſs queen Diana, why ſo long
At Aulis vengeful ſhe reſtrain'd the winds;
Or I will tell thee; her thou mayſt not aſk.
My father, ſporting in her ſacred grove,
Once rouſed a dappled Hart, that bore aloft
His branching horns; and glorying in the prize
Utter'd ſome vaunting words: at theſe incenſed
The daughter of Latona in that port
Detain'd the fleet of Greece, that for her Hart
A recompence my father might preſent
His daughter: to the goddeſs thus ſhe fell
A victim; elſe the fleet had been detain'd
Moor'd in that bay, and not a gale had ſwell'd
Their ſails for Troy, or to the ports of Greece.
For this, reluctant and by ſad conſtraint,

He ſacrificed his daughter, juſt to Greece,
Not for his brother's ſake. But (to allow
Thy plea) to grace the Spartan had his will
Been to the deed aſſenting, for that cauſe
Behoved it thee to ſlay him? By what right?
Take heed thou giveſt not ſanction to a law
'Mongſt mortals, which with vengeance will recoil
On thine own head. If blood muſt be repaid
With blood, if juſtice doth her office, thou
The firſt muſt die. Take heed, nor urge a plea
Of no avail. But tell me, if thy will
Aſſents to tell me, why doſt thou perſiſt
In actions moſt diſgraceful to thy fame?
Why with a blood-ſtain'd murderer ſhare thy couch,
Thy vile aſſociate in my father's death?
How canſt thou bear him children, and expoſe
As outcaſts thoſe, who from an hallow'd bed
Sprung hallow'd? How can I approve theſe things?
Or wilt thou ſay that for thy daughter's death
Theſe deeds are done to ſatiate thy revenge?
Shame on thee if thou ſay'ſt ſo; for to wed
An hoſtile ruffian for a daughter's ſake,
Throws a foul ſtain on honour. But thy ſoul
Rejects monition: ever on thy tongue
Is this complaint, that we with rude reproach
Inſult our mother: Am I then thy child?
Rather thy ſlave, and lead a ſervile life,
Ever beneath the yoke of ills oppreſs'd

By thee and thy compeer. Thy other child,
The poor Oreſtes, ſcarce eſcaped thy hand,
With miſery, exiled from his country, lives.
Oft doſt thou taunt me that I train the Youth
To vengeance on thee: be thou well aſſured
This I had done, had I the pow'r. Now go,
Proclaim me to the world as baſe of ſoul,
As inſolent of tongue, as loſt to ſhame:
If in theſe arts I am expert, they ſhow
That nor thy nature I diſgrace, nor thee.

CHORUS.

I ſee ſhe burns with anger: whether juſt
That anger, no regard, I ſee, is paid.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And what regard from me to her is due,
Who with ſuch rude revilings dares inſult,
And at that age, her mother? What baſe deed
Would ſhe not dare unbluſhing to attempt?

ELECTRA.

At what hath paſs'd, believe me, I now bluſh.
Whate'er thy thought, I am not now to learn
That nor my age, nor me theſe things become:
But thy unkindneſs, and thy deeds, by force
Conſtrain me. By the baſe baſe deeds are taught.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Unbluſhing inſolence! Do I, my words,
My deeds, give birth to thy intemperate ſpeech?

ELECTRA.

It is thy ſpeech, not mine; for thine the deed;
And deeds will always find according ſpeech.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now by Diana, when Ægiſthus comes,
This arrogance unpuniſh'd ſhall not paſs.

ELECTRA.

I had thy leave to ſpeak; yet ſee, with rage
Thou art enflamed: thy paſſion will not hear.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Becauſe thou hadſt my leave to ſpeak thy thoughts,
Wilt thou diſturb me with ill-omen'd words,
Nor ſuffer my oblations to the gods?

ELECTRA.

I ſuffer, I encourage, I approve;
Preſent thy offerings; blame my voice no more;
No word the holy ſilence ſhall diſturb.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou, my attendant, the oblations bring
Of the earth's various fruits, that I may pour
My pray'rs to royal Phœbus, from my ſoul
To chaſe the terrors that appall me now.

O thou, who hold'ſt thy guardian ſtation here,
Now, Phœbus, hear the whiſpers of my voice:
I am not 'mongſt my friends; nor to the light,
While ſhe is near, behoves me all unfold.

By

By envy moved her ever-clamorous tongue
Through all the city wild reports would ſpread.
Hear me e'en thus; thus low muſt be my voice.
The nightly viſions of this doubtful dream,
If they portend me good, Lycæan king,
Bring thou to good effect: if ill, avert
That ill from me, and turn it on my foes!
From this high ſtate if treacherous malice works
To ſink me, cruſh, oh cruſh the cloſe deſign,
Protect me always in this life of bliſs,
To ſway the ſceptre, and to rule the houſe
Of the Atridæ, happy in thoſe friends
Whoſe pleaſing converſe daily I enjoy,
And in thoſe children, who ne'er grieve my heart
With wayward clamours and malignant hate.
Hear me, Lycæan Phœbus, favouring hear,
Grant to us all, as we implore thy grace:
All other things, though ſilence chains my tongue,
Thou, as a god, my ſoul confides, muſt know:
Nought from the ſons of Jove can be conceal'd.

ATTENDANT, CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ATTENDANT.

From you, ye female Argives, may I learn,
Is this the manſion of Mycenæ's king?

CHORUS.

Stranger, it is: thou haſt conjectured well.

ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT.

And this, if not amiſs I judge, his queen:
For in her port are dignity and grace.

CHORUS.

Well haſt thou mark'd our ſovereign: this is ſhe.

ATTENDANT.

Hail queen. I bring thee grateful tidings, ſent
By one to thee and to Ægiſthus dear.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I welcome thy addreſs. But ſay by whom,
Bearing this friendly meſſage, thou art ſent.

ATTENDANT.

From Phanoteus of Phocis, mighty queen:
Important are the tidings which he ſends.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What are they, ſtranger? Tell me: from a friend
Nothing but friendly tidings wilt thou bring.

ATTENDANT.

To ſpeak in brief, Oreſtes is no more.

ELECTRA.

O wretched me! This day I am undone.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What ſay'ſt thou, ſtranger, what? Regard not her.

ATTENDANT.

Again I ſay Oreſtes is no more.

ELECTRA.

Then I am nothing; I too am no more.

CLYTEM-

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Attend thou to thine own concerns. To me
Speak truly, ſtranger; tell me how he died.

ATTENDANT.

And therefore was I ſent: hear then the whole.
The glorious conteſt of the Grecian games
Led him to Delphi: when the herald's voice
Loudly proclaim'd the firſt, the rapid race,
He enter'd with a ſplendor that from all
Drew wonder and applauſe: that graceful form
Deceived not expectation; he firſt reach'd
The goal, and bore the honour'd prize away.
But, of his many deeds to ſpeak in brief,
In ſkill and ſtrength one equal I ne'er ſaw.
Know then at once 'midſt the heroic games
In the five conteſts, as by law ordain'd,
To him the praiſe of conqueſt was aſſign'd,
By the preſiding umpires' voice announced.
Applauding Greece the happy victor hail'd,
Call'd him an Argive, ſounded loud his name,
Oreſtes, ſon of Agamemnon once
The leader of th' illuſtrious hoſt of Greece.
Such was this day: but when ſome god decrees
His doom, not e'en the mighty can eſcape.

L. 704. Theſe five conteſts, the Pentathlon, conſiſted of Leaping, the Foot-race, throwing the Quoit, throwing the Spear, and Wreſtling,

Ἅλμα, Ποδωκείη, Δίσκου, Ἀκοντα, Πάλην.

The Diaulus was a foot-race, in which the competitors turned round a pillar at the end of the ſtadium, and ran back to the barrier from which they ſtarted.

The next day's conteſt was the rapid courſe
Of rolling chariots. With the orient ſun
Ardent 'midſt many rivals he advanced;
One an Achæan, one from Sparta, two
From Libya, ſkill'd to rule the harneſs'd car:
With theſe Oreſtes, his Theſſalian mares
Reſtraining: From Ætolia came a youth,
His courſers colour'd like the burniſh'd gold:
Nor was Magneſia wanting to the courſe:
Proud of his ſnow-white ſteeds an Ænian came,
One came from Athens built by hands divine;
The liſt of heroes a Bœotian cloſed.
Now ſtanding where th' appointed umpires fix'd
By lot their ſtations, and arranged the cars,
Soon as the trumpet gave the ſignal, ſwift
They bounded from the barrier, chear'd their ſteeds,
And toſt their ſlacken'd reins; the rolling wheels
With thunder ſhook the plain, and clouds of duſt
Roſe to the ſkies. Together all were mix'd,
Nor ſpared the laſh, impatient each to paſs
The others axle and high-ſnorting ſteeds;
For o'er their backs and ſummits of the wheels
Their whitening foam they threw, and firey breath.
But ever, the laſt pillar as he reach'd,

L. 736. The chariot-race was not always of the ſame length; it conſiſted at different times of four, of ſeven, of eight, of twelve courſes or rounds. Mr. Weſt fixes this race, in which Oreſtes is ſaid to have contended, at eight. At each round great ſkill and dexterity were ſhown in turning at the laſt pillar, the τέρμα; this was done by drawing in the reins of the near horſe, and giving the other free ſcope.

He

He drew his axle nigh, for on the right
He gave his ſteed the reins, the nearer curb'd.
Thus far the rapid cars roll'd on erect;
Till now the Ænian's wild unmanaged ſteeds
Broke from the ground, and at the ſeventh return
Reckleſs their fronts with headſtrong fury daſh'd
Againſt the Lybian chariot. From this ſhock
Of one, wheel claſh'd with ſhatter'd wheel, and fell;
The wreck of cars fill'd all the Phocian plain.
This ſaw th' Athenian, and, with ſkilful hand
Wheeling aloof, his courſer's ſpeed reſtrain'd,
And paſs'd the wide confuſion of the ſtorm
Roll'd in the middle courſe. His ſteeds behind
Oreſtes drove, the laſt, but high in hope
Foremoſt to reach the goal: but when he ſaw
One only left his rival for the prize,
With ſharper voice he chear'd his flying mares,
And follow'd cloſe. Now ſide by ſide they drove,
Now one, the other now, his courſers' heads
Puſh'd forward. All his other courſes ſafe
Now paſs'd, firm in his car, its wheels erect,
Oreſtes on the left relax'd the rein,
And, as his courſer round the pillar wheel'd,
Daſh'd unawares againſt it; in the nave
The axle broke, and roll'd him o'er the car
Entangled in the reins: his ſteeds uncheck'd

L. 742. This was the conſequence of their running on the inſide of the pillar, round which the Lybian had turned.

Break forth at large, and bound amidſt the courſe.
But when th' aſſembly ſaw him from the car
Hurl'd headlong, they with cries deplored the youth,
His gallant actions, and his hapleſs fate,
As low his head was trail'd along the ground.
And now th' attendant train, his firey ſteeds
Scarce check'd, unbound him ſo deform'd with gore
That not a friend could know the mangled corſe.
The funeral pile was raiſed, the body burn'd,
And to ſome Phocians is the charge aſſign'd
With ſpeed to his paternal land to bear
The poor cold aſhes of the mighty man
Cloſed in a narrow urn, that this dear land,
Which gave him birth, may bear his honour'd tomb.
Theſe, lady, are the tidings which I bring,
How mournful to relate! But to behold,
As we beheld it—miſery never ſhow'd
Scene of like horror to my aching eyes.

CHORUS.

Alas, alas! Our lord's imperial ſtem,
Honour'd ſo long, is periſh'd from its roots.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What an event is this! Almighty Jove,
Shall I with joy receive it, or with grief?
It brings advantage: yet it grieves my ſoul
To gain the ſafety of my life by ills.

ATTENDANT.

Why at theſe tidings, lady, ſink with grief?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nature will touch a mother: though with wrongs
Her heart be rent, ſhe cannot hate her child.

ATTENDANT.

Unthank'd is he that brings unwelcome news.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Why ſhou'dſt thou ſay unwelcome and unthank'd?
It is not ſo: thou bring'ſt me certain proofs
That he is dead, who, born of me, renounced
My breaſts, and all a mother's nurturing care,
Became a fugitive, with ſtrangers lived,
And never ſaw me ſince he left this land,
But charged his father's murder on my head,
And menaced fierce revenge; ſo that by night
Sleep never cloſed mine eyes, nor ſweet repoſe
By day was mine; but each imperious hour
Appall'd me as a victim mark'd for death.
But now, this day, my terrors are no more
From her, or him; ſhe was the greater peſt,
A fury nouriſh'd in my houſe, that wiſh'd
To lap my blood: but from their threats ſecure
I now ſhall paſs my fearleſs life in peace.

ELECTRA.

Ah wretched me! I now have cauſe to mourn
Thy wretched fate, Oreſtes, e'en in death
Thus taunted by a mother. Is this well?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not well with thee: but it is well with him.

ELECTRA.

Hear, Nemeſis, avenger of the dead!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

She heard whom ſhe ſhould hear, and well decreed.

ELECTRA.

Triumph, inſult; for proſperous is thy ſtate.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

That ſtate will thou and thy Oreſtes ſink?

ELECTRA.

No: we are ſunk, and therefore ſink not thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Great is thy merit, ſtranger, great thy meed,
If thou haſt check'd that ever-clamorous tongue.

ATTENDANT.

Now, if theſe things are well, I would depart.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not ſo; that would reflect diſgrace on me,
And on the friend who ſent thee. Go thou in,
And leave her here with clamorous grief to wail
The ruin which hath ſunk her, and her friends.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELECTRA.

Did this unnatural mother ſhow one ſign
Of grief or pity? Did ſhe ſhed a tear?

L. 811. There is great force in this invocation of Nemeſis, as it was the office of that goddeſs to protect the relicks and the memory of the dead. The reply of Clytemneſtra alludes to Iphigenia.

Or

Or once lament a ſon by ſuch a fate
Cut off? She left us with a ſmile of joy.
My dear Oreſtes, how haſt thou deſtroy'd
Thy poor unhappy ſiſter by thy death!
Thou haſt torn from me the fond hope, which chear'd
Alone my ſinking mind, that thou wouldſt live,
Live to avenge my father's death, and me,
Unhappy me. Now whither ſhall I go?
Now I am left alone; deprived of thee,
And of my father, I muſt be again
A ſlave to thoſe whom moſt my ſoul abhors,
The murderers of my father. Is this well?
But never from this moment will I deign
To dwell with them: no, ſtretch'd before this gate,
Unfriended, I will pine my life away:
And let them kill me, if this gives offence
To thoſe who here are lords: death were a grace,
And life a grief: I have no wiſh to live.

CHORUS.

Where are the thunders of almighty Jove?
Where the reſplendent Sun? If they behold,
And calmly in oblivion wrap theſe things?

Electra weeps.

CHORUS.

Why flow thy tears?

Electra weeps and laments aloud.

CHORUS.

Ah, mitigate thy grief!

ELECTRA.

Why wilt thou thus oppreſs me? From the dead,
Already ſunk to the infernal realms,
To ſpeak of hope turns ſorrow to deſpair.

CHORUS.

Amphiaraus, I know, the prophet-king,
Was for the golden bracelets to thoſe realms
Sunk by a woman's falſehood; yet he reigns
Beneath the earth, by all the ſhades revered.

Electra weeps.

CHORUS.

How mournful! for deſtructive was the deed.

ELECTRA.

And on her vengeance fell.

CHORUS.

It fell ſevere.

ELECTRA.

I know it, yes, I know it; 'midſt his grief
A warm avenger roſe: but I have none,
I now have none, for mine is ſnatch'd away.

CHORUS.

Unhappy virgin, mournful are thy ills.

ELECTRA.

I feel them all, an aggregated maſs,
Of various, endleſs, dreadful, hated griefs.

CHORUS.

We ſee thou haſt abundant cauſe of grief.

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

With comfort then miſlead my ſenſe no more;
For from my brother, from th' illuſtrious ſon
Of my great father, I no more have hope.

CHORUS.

Death to all mortals is the common doom.

ELECTRA.

What, when the firey-footed ſteeds contend
For conqueſt, as that poor lamented Youth
To periſh, ſo entangled in the reins!

CHORUS.

This ill, which no preſaging thought, no care——

ELECTRA.

No care indeed, if in a foreign land
He lies neglected, to his mangled corſe
No mournful office by theſe hands perform'd,
Without a tomb, without my ſtreaming tears.

CHRYSOTHEMIS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Joy, my dear ſiſter, wings my quick return,
And with more ſpeed than decency allows.
I bring thee joy, and reſt from all the ills
Beneath whoſe anguiſh thou ſo long haſt groan'd.

ELECTRA.

What haſt thou found to mitigate my griefs,
Which never lenient medicine can heal?

CHRYSO-

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Oreſtes is return'd; know that from me,
As certain as thine eyes behold me here.

ELECTRA.

Thy own misfortunes ſure have hurt thy ſenſe,
Or makeſt thou at thy ills, and mine, a mock?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

No, by the gods that guard our father's houſe,
This is no mock: Oreſtes now is here.

ELECTRA.

And from what mortal hath thine ear received
This vain report, which wins thy firm belief?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Not from another, from my ſelf I ſpeak;
I ſaw th' undoubted proofs, and thence believe.

ELECTRA.

What proof, what confirmation haſt thou ſeen,
Which warms thy ſoul with this diſtemper'd heat?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Nay, by the gods, my ſiſter, hear me; hear
The whole; and of my reaſon then pronounce.

ELECTRA.

Well, if in ſpeaking thou haſt pleaſure, ſpeak.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Then I will tell thee all that I beheld.
My father's honour'd tomb as I approach'd,
White on the ſummit of the mound I ſaw

Large

Large ſtreams of milk late pour'd; the ſepulchre,
Wherein he lies inurn'd, with wreaths of flow'rs,
Glowing in all their various dies, hung round.
I ſaw, and wonder'd, and on each ſide turn'd
Mine eyes, if any mortal might be nigh;
But all was ſtill: then nearer I approach'd
The tomb, and on the pyre's remoteſt verge
Saw criſped locks freſh ſevered from the head.
Forthwith Oreſtes ruſh'd upon my thought,
Such as my mind had imaged him of old;
And theſe I deem'd the pledges of the Youth
Dear to my heart: I took them in my hands,
And from my eyes guſh'd tears; account not theſe
Omens of ill, for they were tears of joy.
And now, as then, my ſoul is well aſſured
That from him only could theſe honours come:
For to what mortal elſe, ſave thee or me,
Could this accord? I did it not, I know,
Nor thou; for from this houſe thou dareſt not move
E'en to the gods. Nor doth my mother's ſoul

Harbour

L. 917. Notwithſtanding the decent reſervedneſs of female manners in antient Greece, the Virgins were not only allowed to be preſent at certain religious ſolemnities, but their attendance was neceſſary: they formed a diſtinguiſhed part in the ſacred proceſſions, and were led by ſome virgin of the higheſt rank. To be confined to their apartments during the celebration of theſe magnificent and feſtal rites was the greateſt mortification. Thus the Chorus of Virgins addreſſes the Electra of Euripides,

The Argives, thus he ſays, proclaim
Three days of feſtal rites divine,
And all the Virgins haſte to Juno's ſhrine.

Harbour ſuch thoughts; nor could ſhe do the deed
Unnoticed. Theſe ſepulchral honours then
Come from Oreſtes. Let deſpair no more
Sink thee, my deareſt ſiſter: the ſame god
O'er the ſame mortals doth not always rule;
Stern was his pow'r; but now perchance this day
On a firm baſe ſhall build our happier ſtate.

ELECTRA.

Alas thy frenzy, how I pity thee!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What, in my tidings doſt thou not rejoice?

ELECTRA.

Thou know'ſt not where thou art, nor what thou ſay'ſt.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Not know what in bright day theſe eyes beheld!

ELECTRA.

Oh, he is dead, my ſiſter: all thy hopes
In him are vaniſh'd: look to him no more.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Ah wretched me, who hath arrived to bring
Theſe mournful tidings?

Electra replies,

No more, my friends the gorgeous veſt,
Which in her happier hours Electra graced,
No more the gem in gold enchaſed
With vivid radiance ſparkling on my breaſt,
Delight my mind: my feet no more
The mazy-winding dance ſhall tread,
No more the train of Argive virgins lead.

L. 193. See alſo L. 335.

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

One, who when he died
Was near, was preſent.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Where is he? My heart
Sinks with aſtoniſhment.

ELECTRA.

Within theſe gates,
And to my mother no unwelcome gueſt.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Unhappy me! What mortal then could bring
Theſe ſolemn honours to our father's tomb?

ELECTRA.

Some friend, as I conjecture, placed them there,
Memorials of Oreſtes now no more.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

O wretched ſtate! Joy wing'd my ſteps to bear
Theſe tidings to thee: little did I know
What woes were gather'd round us: when I came,
In their full force our former ills I find,
Their horror heighten'd by more recent griefs.

ELECTRA.

This is our ſtate. But wou'dſt thou be adviſed
By me, thou ſoon wilt free us from the ills
Which now oppreſs us.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Can I raiſe the dead
Again to life?

ELECTRA.

I mean not that; my mind
Hath not ſuch frenzy.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What wou'dſt thou propoſe
Within my pow'r to aid thee?

ELECTRA.

Dare to act
As I ſhall give thee charge.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

If it produce
Aught of advantage, I ſhall not refuſe
My aid.

ELECTRA.

But weigh this well: no great deſign
Can without toil ſucceed.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I weigh it well;
And far as I have pow'r, will bear it all
With thee.

ELECTRA.

Now hear the purpoſe of my ſoul.
The aid of friends (this truth is not unknown
To thee) we have not; the infernal king
Hath ſnatch'd them from us; and of theſe deprived
We two are left alone. I, whilſt I heard
In youth's freſh vigour that our brother lived,

Fed

Fed the fond hope that he would one day come
With vengeance, for his father's murder, arm'd.
He is no more: I now look up to thee,
That, with thy ſiſter join'd, thou wilt be bold,
And kill the bloody author of this deed,
Ægiſthus. It behoves me now no more
Aught to conceal from thee. Thus ſpiritleſs
How long wilt thou remain? What honeſt hope
Is left thee yet? To thee is left to mourn,
Of all thy father's treaſured wealth deprived;
To thee is left to ſigh, and to grow old
So long neglected, uneſpouſed, cut off
From nuptial rites. And haſt thou yet an hope
Theſe ever ſhall be thine? With keener eye
Forward Ægiſthus looks, nor will permit
One ſcion e'er from thee or me to riſe,
Which muſt be fatal to him. Then purſue
My plan of vengeance: thine will be the praiſe
Of pious reverence to thy father's ſhade,
And to thy brother in the realms below.
Nay more, thou wilt aſſert thy noble birth;
Thou waſt born free, and free thou wilt be call'd
Thenceforth, and to thy bed ſome generous Youth,
Worthy thy high-born race, will then aſpire;
For all with reverence on that virtue gaze,
Which vindicates its honours. Seeſt thou not
What glory thou wilt throw round thee and me,
To me aſſenting? Who, when we appear,

Argive or ſtranger, with this voice of praiſe
Will not ſalute us? "See theſe ſiſters, friends,
Theſe dared to vindicate their father's houſe;
Theſe on his foes, though ſeated on his throne,
Of their own lives regardleſs, greatly led
The pow'rs of vengeance: theſe ſhould all men love,
Theſe all ſhould reverence; on the feſtal days,
And in the full aſſemblies, theſe deſerve
Honour from all; their noble virtues claim
Such meed." Thus all the world ſhall ſound our praiſe,
That while we live, and when we die, our fame
Shall never fade. Then liſten to my voice,
My deareſt ſiſter; for thy father dare,
Dare for thy brother in this work engage;
Redeem me from my ills, redeem thy ſelf;
And know thou this, that to the nobly born
To live diſhonour'd is the fouleſt ſtain.

CHORUS.

This is a theme of danger, and requires
Prudence in her that ſpeaks, and her that hears.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Greatly behoved her ere ſhe ſpoke, my friends,
(But that intemperate paſſion rules her mind)
The guard of prudence: this ſhe caſts away.
On what high hope depending art thou arm'd
With this fierce daring, and doſt call me forth
To act beneath thy guidance? Seeſt thou not
Thou art a woman, not a man, in ſtrength

Inferior

Inferior to thy foes; and that each day
A more exalted ſtate their fortune finds,
Whilſt ours flows backwards, and to nothing ſinks?
A foe ſo potent who ſhall dare attack,
And without ruin from his force retreat?
Take heed leſt to our preſent ills we add
A weight of heavier ills, ſhould any hear
This bold diſcourſe; for little would avail,
Little advantage us our glorious fame,
If with diſgrace we die; for not in death
Is the moſt dreadful ill, but when we wiſh
To die, and have not death within our pow'r.
But I implore thee, ere thou cruſh us quite
In hideous ruin, and o'er all our race
Bring total deſolation, check thy rage;
And this bold converſe I will always keep
Secret and undivulged. Do thou reſtrain
Thy daring ſpirit, and by time be taught,
Weak as thou art, to ſovereign pow'r to yield.

CHORUS.

Aſſent: no greater good can mortals gain
Than ſage diſcretion, and a prudent mind.

ELECTRA.

This is not unexpected: well I knew

L. 1026. Chryſothemis well knew that the fear of death would have no influence on her high-ſpirited ſiſter; ſhe therefore points out circumſtances of greater terror. To die, ſhe ſays, is not the moſt dreadful ill; for not death, but the pain and indignity of puniſhment, from which death would be a deſireable refuge, are the miſeries moſt to be dreaded. Her reaſoning is pertinent and ſtrong.

That

That thou with ſcorn wou'dſt ſpurn what I propoſed.
Then ſhall this hand alone perform the deed,
Nor uneffected leave the glorious work.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Oh, had this ſpirit, when our father died
Been thine! What deeds had then thy hand atchieved!

ELECTRA.

Such was my nature then, but leſs confirm'd
My ſpirit.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

May thy ſpirit through thy life
Remain the ſame!

ELECTRA.

Theſe cold monitions ſhow
Thou wilt not give me aid.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

For ill deſigns
May be repaid with ills.

ELECTRA.

I muſt applaud
Thy prudence, but abhor thy timid mind.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

This I can bear to hear: and when to me
Thou giveſt applauſe——

ELECTRA.

Never: applauſe from me
Thou never ſhalt receive.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

That in its length
Of courſe will time decide.

ELECTRA.

Away; in thee
I have no aid.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Thou haſt, were but thy mind
Open to reaſon.

ELECTRA.

To thy mother go,
Tell her theſe things.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I harbour not ſuch hate
Againſt thee.

ELECTRA.

Yet thy mind can harbour thoughts
To lead me to diſgrace.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Not to diſgrace,
But prudence.

ELECTRA.

Muſt I follow what to thee
Seems right?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

When reaſon does her office, thou
Shalt be my guide.

ELECTRA.

What ſhame to ſpeak ſo well,
And act ſo ill!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Thou clearly haſt explain'd
Thy own diſeaſe.

ELECTRA.

What, ſeem I not to ſpeak
With juſtice?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

There are times when juſtice leads
To ruin.

ELECTRA.

By ſuch laws I will not live.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

But if thou doſt theſe things, thou wilt applaud
Me, and my prudence.

ELECTRA.

Theſe things I will do,
Nothing appall'd by thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Art thou reſolved?
And will no counſil move thee?

ELECTRA.

To my ſoul
Ill counſils are moſt hateful.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Much averſe
Thy mind appears to all I ſay.

ELECTRA.

By long
Deliberate thought my purpoſe firm is fix'd.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I leave thee, ſince thy mind with ſcorn rejects
My words, nor can I favour thy deſigns.

ELECTRA.

Go then; and wiſh it with what warmth thou may'ſt,
I never will hold converſe with thee more.
Folly alone a thing ſo ſlight would court.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

This may thy mind think wiſdom; think ſo ſtill:
But 'midſt thy ſufferings thou wilt deem me wiſe.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Mark you the birds that ſkim the air,
O'er their full neſts they wave the buſy wing,
By nature taught with pious care
Food to their callow young to bring,
To ſwell their plumes, and fit them for the ſkies.
Is man in nature's lore thus wiſe?

But, by the Thunderer's angry flame,
By Themis on her heavenly throne ſublime,
Vengeance ſhall ſoon o'ertake the crime.
O thou, who fill'ſt this world, wide Fame,
Bear hence thy joyleſs voice of woe,
And fill with accents dread the world below!

ANTISTROPHE 1.

There 'midſt the dead th' Atridæ tell
That guilt triumphant in their houſe remains;
That there the ſcreaming Furies dwell;
That Diſcord 'twixt the ſiſters reigns.
Toſs'd in the ſtorms of fate, alone, betray'd,
Electra ſighs in vain for aid;
Still for her father pours her tears,
Still in wild, melancholy notes complains,
Like Philomela's mournful ſtrains:
No rage of tyrant pow'r ſhe fears;
Content in death to cloſe her eyes
Theſe furies might her vengeful hand ſurprize.

STROPHE 2.

Thus low ſinks one of high-born race?
Thou art not ſunk; to riſe be thine:
The noble ſoul will ne'er diſgrace
The glories of its antient line;
Nor, when misfortune darkens round,
Obſcure and dead to fame be found.
O'er thee, unhappy, generous maid,
Hath miſery caſt her baleful ſhade;

That

That ſhade thy choice, through high diſdain,
Of guilt and all her gorgeous train,
Aſpiring to enrich thy name
With wiſdom's and with virtue's fame.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Oh may'ſt thou live in royal ſtate,
Triumphant o'er thy proſtrate foes,
As now beneath their hand thy fate
Hath ſunk thee in diſgrace and woes!
For I have ſeen thy generous ſoul
Burſt from misfortune's harſh controul;
Have ſeen thee with a fix'd diſdain
Advance againſt her threat'ning train,
Bearing the high heroic thought
By heav'n-deſcended juſtice taught,
And all the firm mind's holy fires
Which piety to Jove inſpires.

ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ORESTES.

Say, female Argives, are we well inform'd,
Our ſteps unerring guided as we wiſh?

CHORUS.

What wou'dſt thou aſk? Why hither art thou come?

ORESTES.

I ſeek the manſion where Ægiſthus dwells.

CHORUS.

Right are thy ſteps: no blame thy guide deſerves.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

To thoſe within which of you will announce
Our preſence, charged in common with affairs
Of no unwelcome nature to your lords?

CHORUS.

She, as by birth neareſt to them allied.

ORESTES.

Go, lady, let them be with ſpeed inform'd
That men from Phocis ſent Ægiſthus ſeek.

ELECTRA.

Unhappy me! Bring you undoubted proofs
Of that report, which reach'd our ears before?

ORESTES.

I know not: of Oreſtes is my charge
To ſpeak, by aged Strophius hither ſent.

ELECTRA.

What, ſtranger? How am I oppreſs'd with fear!

ORESTES.

Of the dead youth the poor remains we bear,
As thou may'ſt ſee, in this ſmall vaſe encloſed.

ELECTRA.

Then I indeed am wretched: now my grief
Is certain; it is brought before my eyes.

ORESTES.

If for the poor Oreſtes flow thy tears,
Know that within this urn his body lies.

ELECTRA.

Now by the gods, O ſtranger, if this vaſe
Contain Oreſtes, give it to my hands;
That o'er his aſhes as I pour my tears,
My ſelf and all my race I may bewail.

ORESTES.

Whoe'er ſhe be, entruſt it to her hands;
For not in hatred makes ſhe this requeſt,
But as a friend, or one by blood allied.

ELECTRA.

Thou ſad memorial, now the ſole remains
Of what was once Oreſtes, to my heart
Moſt dear, with other hopes I ſent thee hence,
Not to receive thee thus; for in my hands
I bear thee, nothing now; a ſplendid Youth,
To glory born, I ſent thee from this houſe,
Oh hadſt thou died, ere by theſe hands preſerved,
And, ſnatch'd from ſlaughter, to a foreign land
I ſent thee! Hadſt thou died in that ſad day,
Some little portion of thy father's tomb
Thou wou'dſt have ſhared: but thou haſt periſh'd now
Far from thy houſe, and from thy country far,
A wandering exile, from thy ſiſter far.
Nor in the cleanſing lavers did I bathe
With theſe fond hands thy corſe, nor, as became
A ſiſter, bear from the conſuming flames
The mournful burden. By a ſtranger's hands
Theſe duties paid, thou comeſt a little duſt

Cloſed

Cloſed in a little urn. Unhappy me,
How vain is all my former nurturing care,
All the ſweet toil for thee employ'd, how loſt!
E'en for thy mother thou didſt never ſhow
More fondneſs than for me; no menial hand
Around thee was engaged; thou waſt my charge,
And thy fond tongue ſtill liſp'd thy ſiſter's name.
All theſe endearments in one day are loſt,
With thee they died; thou, like a ruſhing ſtorm,
Haſt paſs'd away, and with thee ſwept them all.
My father is no more, I am no more,
And death hath ſnatch'd thee hence; our foes exult;
My mother, how unworthy of that name!
Is wild with joy: yet ſecret meſſage oft
Aforetime haſt thou ſent, that thou wou'dſt come
Dreadful in vengeance; but unhappy fate,
Thy fate and mine, hath check'd the great intent,
And, for my loved Oreſtes, ſent thee thus,
Cold aſhes, and an unavailing ſhade.
Wretched remains! And what a wretch am I!
Thus art thou come? How mournful! Woe is me!
What ruin on thy ſiſter haſt thou brought!
Yes, dear Oreſtes, ruin on my head
Thy death hath brought. O miſerable me!
Receive me then within thy ſheltering urn,
Nothing to nothing; that henceforth with thee
I in the realms beneath may ever dwell.
For whilſt thou here hadſt life, with thee I ſhared

One

One common fortune: now it is my wiſh
In death to ſhare thy tomb. The dead are free
From all the various woes of mortal life.

CHORUS.

Thou from a mortal father drew'ſt thy birth;
Thence be admoniſh'd: thy Oreſtes too
Was mortal; let that thought aſſuage thy grief.
Death is the debt of nature all muſt pay.

ORESTES.

Oh, I muſt ſpeak; to my diſtracted thoughts
I muſt give utterance; ſtruggling in my breaſt
Theſe ſtrong emotions will break forth in words.

ELECTRA.

What grief is thine? Why this empaſſion'd ſpeech?

ORESTES.

See I in thee Electra's honour'd form?

ELECTRA.

I am Electra, and a very wretch.

ORESTES.

Ah, my heart bleeds to ſee thee thus.

ELECTRA.

For me
Why, ſtranger, doſt thou grieve?

ORESTES.

Oh, how diſgraced
With foul and impious treatment!

ELECTRA.

Such my ſtate,
Such as by thee deplored.

ORESTES.

Of nuptial rites
Deprived, and train'd to miſery!

ELECTRA.

Thus on me
Why doſt thou gaze, and ſigh?

ORESTES.

I till this hour
Knew nothing of my ills.

ELECTRA.

How from my words
Doſt thou now know them?

ORESTES.

I behold thee now
In many ills conſpicuous.

ELECTRA.

Of my ills
Thou ſeeſt but few.

ORESTES.

How more abhor'd than theſe
Can I behold?

ELECTRA.

With murderers that I dwell
By ſad conſtraint.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

Murderers of whom? What ill
Doth this denote?

ELECTRA.

My father: and to them
I live perforce a ſlave.

ORESTES.

By whom compell'd
To this neceſſity?

ELECTRA.

A mother's name
She bears; a mother's tenderneſs for me
She never felt.

ORESTES.

How? Cruel is her hand?
Or doth ſhe feed thee 'mongſt her ſlaves?

ELECTRA.

E'en thus
She treats me, and with every barbarous ill.

ORESTES.

Haſt thou no friend to aid thee? From ſuch wrongs
None to protect thee?

ELECTRA.

None: I had a friend,
His aſhes thou haſt brought.

ORESTES.

Thy wretched ſtate
With pity I behold.

ELECTRA.

Of all mankind
Thou alone pityeſt me.

ORESTES.

For I alone
Am come with ſorrow for thy ſufferings moved.

ELECTRA.

Art thou by blood allied?

ORESTES.

If theſe were friends,
I would ſpeak freely.

ELECTRA.

Speak then: they are friends
In whom thou may'ſt confide.

ORESTES.

Give back that urn
And thou ſhalt know the whole.

ELECTRA.

Oh, by the gods,
Deal not thus with me!

ORESTES.

Let my words prevail;
No ill do they intend thee.

ELECTRA.

This dear pledge
I pray thee take not from me.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

To thy pray'r
I cannot yield.

ELECTRA.

How wretched ſhall I be,
If, loved Oreſtes, of thy tomb deprived!

ORESTES.

Speak words of happier omen; for no cauſe
Haſt thou to mourn.

ELECTRA.

Have I no cauſe to mourn
A brother's death?

ORESTES.

Thy ſtate it ſuits not thus
To ſpeak.

ELECTRA.

Am I unworthy of the dead?

ORESTES.

Of none art thou unworthy: but to thee
This now is no concern.

ELECTRA.

Not though I bear
His aſhes in this urn!

ORESTES.

That was a tale
Framed to deceive. Oreſtes lies not there.

ELECTRA.

Where then is my unhappy brother's tomb?

ORESTES.

It is not: for the living hath no tomb.

ELECTRA.

Young man, what ſay'ſt thou?

ORESTES.

Nothing falſe I ſpeak.

ELECTRA.

Doth he then live?

ORESTES.

If here I ſtand alive.

ELECTRA.

Art thou Oreſtes?

ORESTES.

Mark this ſignet well;
It was my father's: this will prove my truth.

ELECTRA.

O welcome day!

ORESTES.

Moſt welcome to us both.

ELECTRA.

Is it thy voice I hear? Art thou then come?
And in theſe arms Oreſtes do I hold?

ORESTES.

And henceforth ever may'ſt thou hold him thus!

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

Ye daughters of Mycenæ, my loved friends,
You ſee Oreſtes but by fiction dead,
And by that honeſt fiction thus preſerved.

CHORUS.

We ſee him; in thy fortune we are bleſt,
And tears of joy ſteal trickling from our eyes.

ELECTRA.

Thou gem, thou offspring of the deareſt man,
To me for ever dear, art thou then come——
Thus haſt thou found—at length art thou arrived—
And doſt thou ſee whom thou haſt wiſh'd to ſee!

ORESTES.

Behold me here: but check thy tranſports, wait
In ſilence the event.

ELECTRA.

Why ſilent wait?

ORESTES.

Within theſe hoſtile gates left any hear.

ELECTRA.

Now by Diana, chaſt unconquer'd queen,
My ſoul diſdains to tremble at a rout
Of helpleſs women here for ever throng'd.

ORESTES.

Yet women ſometimes feel the martial flame,
And greatly dare: of this thou haſt ſtrong proof.

ELECTRA.

Oh, thou haſt touch'd upon a dreadful ill,
For ever open to the light of heav'n,
Inexpiable, monſtrous, from the mind
Never to be effaced, our mournful lot.

ORESTES.

I know it well; and when the proper time
Shall warn me, will remember the foul deed.

ELECTRA.

All times to me are proper, and all times
Warn me to ſpeak what juſtly I may ſpeak:
Scarce is the liberty of ſpeech now mine.

ORESTES.

Preſerve that liberty, by knowing well
This is no time to give thy ſpeech free ſcope.

ELECTRA.

Hath ſilence then ſuch merit, that my words
Muſt yield to it, whilſt thou art in my ſight,
Thus unexpected, thus beyond my hopes?

ORESTES.

Soon as the gods commanded me, I came.

ELECTRA.

This to my former pleaſure gives new life:
If by the mandate of the gods thou comeſt,
That gives a preſage of their heav'nly aid.

ORESTES.

I would not check thy pleaſure; but I fear
Its wild exceſs thy reaſon will o'erpow'r.

ELECTRA.

After ſuch length of time ſince thou haſt deign'd
To make me happy with thy dear return,
Do not, ſince thou haſt found me thus oppreſs'd
With many ſorrows, do not take from me
The heart-felt pleaſure which thy preſence gives.

ORESTES.

That pleaſure none ſhall dare to take from thee.

ELECTRA.

Doſt thou aſſent?

ORESTES.

How can I but aſſent?

ELECTRA.

O my loved friends, I hear that pleaſing voice
I could not hope to hear. But when I heard
News of thy death, I gave my grief no voice,
Nor rent the air with mournful cries: but now
I hold thee, that dear aſpect now I view,
Which in my ills I never could forget——

ORESTES.

Theſe words of tranſport for awhile forbear;
Nor tell me that my mother is moſt vile;
Nor that Ægiſthus with a laviſh hand
In ſenſeleſs riot waſtes my father's wealth.
Such converſe would engage th' important time,
Preventing action. With the preſent hour
What beſt accords inform me: like my ſelf

Shall I appear, or laying ſecret ſnares
Cruſh our inſulting foes? But take thou heed,
Nor, when we enter, let thy mother ſee
A ſmile of gladneſs bright'ning on thy face:
But wear the marks of ſorrow, as my death
Were real: when the work ſhall be atchieved,
Then we may ſmile, and freely ſhow our joy.

ELECTRA.

Thy will, my brother, ſhall in this be guide
To mine: from thee this pleaſure I received,
It comes not from my ſtores: nor would I grieve
Thy heart e'en for a moment, might I gain
The greateſt prize: ill thus ſhould I advance
Our preſent fortune. Well to thee is known
The ſtate, as we could wiſh it, of this houſe,
Ægiſthus abſent, and my mother here.
Nor fear that ſhe will ſee a ſmile of joy
Bright'ning my face; to her I ſtill muſt wear
The gloom of deep-fix'd hatred; and my tears,
Since firſt I ſaw thee, have not ceaſed to flow;
But they are tears of joy. How ſhould they ceaſe?
For in one inſtant I have ſeen thee dead,
And living. Theſe things ſo ſurpaſs my thought,
That ſhould my father from the dead ariſe,
I ſhould not think it a mere ſhadowy form,
I would believe I ſaw the real man.
Since on this dangerous taſk thou art return'd,
Be the whole conduct thine. Had I been left

Alone,

Alone, I had not fail'd my ſelf to ſave
With glory, or with glory to have died.

ORESTES.

I wiſh thee to be ſilent, for I hear
The ſteps of one advancing to theſe gates.

ELECTRA.

Strangers, go in: you bear what in the houſe
None will reject, nor will receive with joy.

ATTENDANT, ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ATTENDANT.

What madneſs this? Is life no more your care?
Where is your prudence? Where your heedful thought
Of danger? Know you not that you now ſtand
Not on the verge, but in the midſt of ills,
The greateſt ills? And had not I long watch'd
Within this portal, your deſigns had found
An entrance ere yourſelves; my cautious care
To this I have oppoſed. But now break off
Your long diſcourſe, and theſe wild cries of joy,
And enter: the important moment calls
For action: miſchief lurks beneath delay.

L. 1356. This is artfully ſaid. As Electra knew not who was coming to the gates, ſhe addreſſes Oreſtes and his friend as ſtrangers, and bids them enter.—Camerar.—The latter part of her ſpeech has that ambiguity, ſo frequent in the Grecian Drama, "where more is meant than meets the ear."

ORESTES.

How, when I enter, ſhall I find the ſtate
Of things within?

ATTENDANT.

As thou cou'dſt wiſh: not one
Is there who knows thee.

ORESTES.

Didſt thou, as behoved,
Report me dead?

ATTENDANT.

Though thou art living here,
There thou art deem'd one of the ſhades below.

ORESTES.

Do they rejoice at this? What did they ſay?

ATTENDANT.

Firſt do the deed, then thou ſhalt know. With them
All now is well, e'en things that are not well.

ELECTRA.

Who, I conjure thee tell me, is this man?

ORESTES.

Doſt thou not know——

ELECTRA.

My mind retains no trace.

ORESTES.

Him, to whoſe hands aſſign'd thy prudent care
In ſecret ſent me to the Phocian realms?

ELECTRA.

Is this the man, when my loved father fell
'Mongſt many faithleſs only faithful found?

ORESTES.

This is the man: but aſk me now no more.

ELECTRA.

O thou dear light! Preſerver of the houſe
Of Agamemnon, ſole preſerver! How
Art thou come back? Art thou that faithful man,
Who from a thouſand threatening ills preſerved
My brother and my ſelf? Bleſt be thy hands
That bore him hence. How pleaſant are the ſteps
Of thy return! But when we late converſed,
Why keep thy ſelf unknown? Why not diſcloſe
The antient friend? Why pierce my heart with words,
When thou hadſt deeds to fill my ſoul with joy?
Hail, O my father! For methinks I ſee
My father: hail! Of all mankind this day
Thee have I hated moſt, and moſt have loved.

ATTENDANT.

Ceaſe thy enquiries. What remains untold
The rolling courſe of many nights and days
Will ſhow thee. Now, O princes, is the time
To act; now Clytemneſtra is alone;
Now not a man is in the houſe; if now
You make delay, with others wiſer far
Than theſe, and more in number, you muſt fight.

ORESTES.

Not words, my Pylades, but deeds muſt now
Take place: this inſtant let us enter, firſt
With reverence bending to my father's gods,
That in this portal have their hallow'd ſeats.

ELECTRA.

Royal Apollo, hear them, favouring hear;
Me too, for oft before thee have I ſtood,
Offering with pious hand whate'er was mine
To offer, hear me. Now, Lycæan king,
I bring thee all I have, my pray'rs, my vows,
My adoration: in our great attempt
Propitious give us aid, and ſhow mankind
The vengeance of the gods on impious deeds!

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

See this Mars againſt his foes
Breathing ſlaughter furious goes.
Faithful to the ſcent of blood
On him waits a ravening brood,
Dogs of hell, with eager chace
Train'd the murderer's ſteps to trace:
On they ruſh with horrid joy,
Keen, and certain to deſtroy.
Did not this my ſoul preſage?
Slumbers now his vengeful rage?

ANTISTROPHE.

See him prompt to aid the dead,
Range these courts with secret tread.
O'er each room his eyes are roll'd,
Scenes of royal pomp, of old
With his father's treasures stor'd.
Fierce he grasps his keen-edged sword.
Hermes, brooking no delay,
Leads him on the destined way;
And the great avenger shrouds,
Guileful, in a veil of clouds.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELECTRA.

My dearest friends, they now are in the act,
E'en now: in silence then await th' event.

CHORUS.

How! Tell us all. What are they doing now?

ELECTRA.

A cauldron for the burial she prepares,
And they stand nigh.

CHORUS.

Why hither art thou come?

ELECTRA.

To watch: that should Ægisthus chance to come,
He may not enter ere they are aware.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*

O miserable me! Beneath this roof
Have I no friends? Are none but murderers here?

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

One cries within. Hark! Hear you not my friends?

CHORUS.

I heard; and ſhuddering horror chills my blood.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*

Where art thou, O Ægiſthus? Wretched me!

ELECTRA.

Again that piercing cry!

CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*

My ſon, my ſon

Have pity on thy mother!

ELECTRA.

But from thee

He found no pity, none his father found.

CHORUS.

Unhappy realm! Unhappy race! Now fate

Day after day deſtroys thee, quite deſtroys.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*

Oh! I am wounded.

ELECTRA.

If thou canſt, repeat

That ſtroke.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*

Ah wretched me, another wound!

ELECTRA.

Oh that Ægiſthus had like cauſe to groan!

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

The curſe now haſtes to be fulfill'd: they live,
Who lie beneath the earth; and ſtreams of blood
The dead, from thoſe who ſhed their blood, exact.

ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELECTRA.

See, they are here, their hands diſtain'd with blood
From the firſt victim of their fury pour'd.
I need not aſk, Oreſtes, what is done.

ORESTES.

All is well done within theſe gates, if well
The Oracle commanded. She is dead,
The wretched woman. Henceforth fear no more
Diſgraceful inſults from thy mother's pride.

CHORUS.

Forbear. Ægiſthus plainly I perceive.

ELECTRA.

Go back, with ſpeed go back.

ORESTES.

See you this man?
Comes he upon us?

ELECTRA.

He will ſoon be here;
Rejoicing from the ſuburbs he returns.

CHORUS.

Retire within the portal: as before
You well conducted that attempt, ſo now——

ORESTES.

Fear not: we will effect it to thy wiſh.

ELECTRA.

Nay, linger not a moment.

ORESTES.

I am gone.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELECTRA.

What here th' occaſion calls for, be my care.
This man then—It were well to ſooth his ear
With a few gentle words, that he may ruſh
Without a thought on their avenging ſwords.

ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Where are theſe Phocian ſtrangers, who, I hear,
Have brought the tidings that amidſt the wreck
Of claſhing cars Oreſtes breath'd his laſt?
Which of you knows? Of thee I aſk, of thee,
Thee in times paſt of ſoul untamed: as thee
It moſt imports, thou canſt inform me beſt.

ELECTRA.

Too well I know: I were a ſtranger elſe
To what concerns the deareſt of my friends.

ÆGISTHUS.

Where are the ſtrangers? Tell me.

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

Enter'd here,

And welcome guests.

ÆGISTHUS.

What, spoke they of his death

As certain?

ELECTRA.

What convinces more than words,

They brought undoubted proof.

ÆGISTHUS.

May I behold

That proof which carries certainty?

ELECTRA.

Thou may'st:

That sight thy envy will not raise.

ÆGISTHUS.

Great joy

Thou givest me now: not such hath been thy wont.

ELECTRA.

Go then: if this can give thee joy, rejoice.

ÆGISTHUS.

Be silent, and set wide the gates, that all

Of Argos and Mycenæ may behold:

That if a man of them had in his thoughts

Cherish'd vain hopes, he now may view this corse,

L. 1494. Ægisthus, imagining that these Phocian strangers had brought the dead body of Orestes, expected to find it laid at the entrance of the house, ad limen, such being the general usage of antiquity: under this expectation he commanded the gates to be opened.

And bear my curb; nor, hardening in his pride,
Draw on his head the terrors of my wrath.

ELECTRA.

I know my duty: for by time my mind
Is taught obedience to the ſovereign pow'rs.

The gates are thrown open; the body of Clytemneſtra lies covered.

ORESTES, PYLADES, ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

O Jove this is a ſight, which hath not fall'n
But to my wiſh. If Vengeance waits my joy,
I know not. From the corſe remove the veil,
That he my lamentations may receive,
For nearly to my blood he was allied.

ORESTES.

Remove it thou: thy office this, not mine,
To view, and kindly to addreſs the dead.

ÆGISTHUS.

I will: thou doſt adviſe me well. Go thou,
Call Clytemneſtra. Is ſhe in the houſe?

ORESTES.

Ay, ſhe is near thee; ſeek her not elſewhere.

L. 1503. It was the office of Ægiſthus, as nearly related, to lament over the body of Oreſtes; on the contrary he expreſſes an indecent joy: this was an inſult to the dead; he recollects himſelf, and apprehenſive of the vengeance of Nemeſis, determines upon a friendly addreſs to the deceaſed.

L. 1509. By thus ſending his attendant away, he is left without aſſiſtance.

ÆGISTHUS, *removing the veil.*

Ah, what a ſight is this!

ORESTES.

Whom doſt thou fear?
Or whom not know?

ÆGISTHUS.

Ah me, amidſt the toils
Of what inſidious hunters am I fall'n!

ORESTES.

Doſt thou not yet perceive that with the dead,
So deem'd by thee, long converſe thou haſt held?

ÆGISTHUS.

Ah me! too well I know it; and theſe words
Can from none other but Oreſtes come.

ORESTES.

Excellent prophet! But thy ſkill before
Deceived thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

I am loſt, in ruin ſunk:
Yet hear me; let me ſpeak; I will be brief.

ELECTRA.

No; hear him not, my brother; by the gods,
Hear no protracted ſpeech. What would a wretch
Plunged in the midſt of evils, and to death
Devoted, profit by a ſhort delay?
No; let him die this inſtant, and when dead

Obtain

Obtain such burial as his deeds deserve,
Far from our sight: for all his former wrongs
To me this vengeance only can atone.

ORESTES.

Enter the gates this instant; for not words
Must now decide the contest, but thy life.

ÆGISTHUS.

Within these walls why lead me? If the deed
Be just and noble, why in darkness done?
Thy hand is ready, why not kill me here?

ORESTES.

Give not the law to me. Go; where thy hand
Murder'd my father, there thy blood shall flow.

ÆGISTHUS.

This is of strong necessity: this house
Must see the present and the future ills
Doom'd to the race of Pelops by the fates.

ORESTES.

Ills doom'd to thee: prophetic is my voice.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou canst not from thy father boast this skill.

ORESTES.

No more replies; no more delays: away.

ÆGISTHUS.

Lead thou the way.

L. 1527. Ægisthus and Clytemnestra were buried without the city at a little distance from the walls; these murderers being thought unworthy of a tomb in the place where Agamemnon lay. Pausan. Corinthiac.

ORESTES.

Before me thou ſhalt go.

ÆGISTHUS.

Haſt thou a fear I ſhould eſcape thy ſword?

ORESTES.

To make death bitter to thee, as thou wouldſt
Thou ſhalt not die: now to command is mine.
Thus by ſwift-ruſhing vengeance periſh all,
Who dare to violate the ſacred laws:
Leſs frequent then would impious deeds be ſeen.

CHORUS.

O race of Atreus, ſcarce haſt thou arrived
Through many ſufferings at thy antient ſtate
Of liberty, by this bold deed atchieved!

FINIS.

C.R. III.

ELECTRA.

ORESTES.

Before me clout that ye.

REGISTHUS.

Hath thou a fear I should elape thy fwod?

ORESTES.

To make death bitter to thee, as thou would
Thou fhalt not die: [illegible] mand is mine.
Thus by fwift-rufhin[illegible] perish all,
Who dare to violate the[illegible] Laws:
Lefs frequent then would impious deeds be feen.

CHORUS.

O race of Atreus, feeree hath thou arrived
Through many furferings at thy antient date
Of liberty, by this bold deed atchieved!

FINIS.